

The History of al-Ṭabarī

VOLUME I

General Introduction
and
From the Creation to the Flood



TRANSLATED BY FRANZ ROSENTHAL

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THE HISTORY OF AL-ṬABARĪ

AN ANNOTATED TRANSLATION

VOLUME I

General Introduction

and

From the Creation to the Flood



The History of al-Ṭabarī

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The History of al-Ṭabarī
(*Ta'riḫ al-rusul wa'l-mulūk*)

VOLUME I

General Introduction
and
From the Creation to the Flood

translated and annotated
by

Franz Rosenthal

Yale University

State University of New York Press

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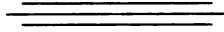
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General Editor's Preface



The History of Prophets and Kings (*Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l-mulūk*) by Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (839–923), rendered in the present work as the *History of al-Ṭabarī*, is by common consent the most important universal history produced in the world of Islam. It has been translated here in its entirety for the first time for the benefit of non-Arabists, with historical and philological notes for those interested in the particulars of the text.

Ṭabarī's monumental work explores the history of ancient nations, with special emphasis on biblical peoples and prophets, the legendary and factual history of ancient Iran, and, in great detail, the rise of Islam, the life of the Prophet Muḥammad, and the history of the Islamic world down to the year 915.

In 1971, I proposed that UNESCO include a complete translation of Ṭabarī's History in its Collection of Representative Works. At a meeting chaired by the late Roger Cailliois, UNESCO agreed; but the Commission in charge of Arabic works favored other priorities, mostly of a literary kind. At the time I was in charge of UNESCO's Collection of Persian Representative Works, a program which was managed within the framework of the activities of the Iranian Institute of Translation and Publication (*Bungāh-i Tarjama wa Nashr-i Kitāb*). Failing to enlist the support of the Arab Commission, I persuaded the Institute to undertake the task.

My interest in the translation of Ṭabarī's history derived not only from the desire to see an outstanding historical work made available to non-Arabists, but also from the fact that Ṭabarī is

the most important source for Iranian history from the rise of the Sasanian dynasty in the third century to the year 915. By rights, the task should have been undertaken by a scholar of Islamic history and classical Arabic, in neither of which fields can I claim any expertise; but I thought it a pity to let the rare opportunity presented by the sponsors of the project to be lost. Fully aware of my limitations and convinced of the importance of the participation of specialists in the project, I enlisted the assistance of a number of excellent scholars in the field.

Preliminary work on the project began in 1974 and I invited Professor Franz Rosenthal of Yale University to bring the benefit of his scholarship and experience to this venture. An Editorial Board originally consisting of Professors Rosenthal, Ihsan Abbas of the American University in Beirut, and myself was envisaged. I later invited Professors C.E. Bosworth of the University of Manchester and Jacob Lassner of Wayne State University to cooperate as members of the Board of Editors. We then began a steady search for able and willing scholars to take part in the project. Ideally we were looking for historians of medieval Islam with a command of classical Arabic.

The Leiden edition was the obvious text on which to base the translation of the History as it is thus far the only critical and scholarly edition. It was prepared by a number of competent scholars in the last quarter of the nineteenth century under the able direction of the Dutch scholar M.J. de Goeje, and published by E.J. Brill of Leiden, Holland, in fourteen volumes with an index volume and a supplementary volume, between 1879 and 1901.

One of our first tasks was to divide the text into manageable sections to be assigned for translation and annotation. The text was divided arbitrarily into 38 sections of about 200 pages each, but in a manner that allowed each section, as far as possible, to be used independently. The general size of the sections was dictated by the desire to leave adequate space for annotation, and to make it possible for the best and busiest scholars in the field to participate. Each section was given a separate title as a short guide to its contents.

It was obvious that in a project of this size, given the differ-

*See pp. 141 ff. of Professor Rosenthal's introduction to the present volume for more details on this edition and the merits of the Cairo edition.

ent viewpoints on translation among scholars and their different styles of rendering Arabic into English, we needed clear guidelines to ensure an essential modicum of consistency. It was necessary to make the translation of some frequently used phrases and expressions uniform. For instance, *Amīr al-mu'minīn*, the title of the caliphs, can be, and has been, translated in different ways. It was important that we used a single rendering of the term ("Commander of the Faithful"). Furthermore, we had to insist on uniformity in the spelling of place-names. To accommodate these concerns, we established a series of guidelines which addressed the questions of format, rubrics, annotation, bibliography, and indexing. According to the guidelines, which were communicated to participating scholars, the project aimed at a translation both faithful and idiomatic—an ideal which we realized was nevertheless far from easy to accomplish. Concern for consistency required that the volumes be carefully edited by an Arabic scholar thoroughly familiar with the guidelines established by the Editorial Board.

This task was originally entrusted to Professor Lassner, but as the number of manuscripts claimed more of his time than he could devote to editing, Professor Bosworth's assistance, too, was enlisted; Professor Rosenthal has also been generously giving of his time for editorial purposes. Naturally this does not mean that all the volumes of *Ṭabarī* follow the same style or that all Arabic terms have been translated in exactly the same way. Variations do occur, but every effort has been made to ensure not only accuracy and readability, but also consistency.

The system of romanization commonly employed by present-day Arabists and Islamicists in the English-speaking world was chosen. Although the system is not universally accepted in all its details, it is hoped that it meets the requirements of accurate transliteration.

Ṭabarī very often quotes his sources verbatim and traces the chains of transmission (*isnād*) to an original source. The chains of transmitters are, for the sake of brevity, rendered by the individual links in the chain separated by a dash (—). Thus, "according to the Ibn Ḥumayd—Salamah—Ibn Ishāq" means that *Ṭabarī* received the report from Ibn Ḥumayd who said that he was told by Salamah, who said that he was told by Ibn Ishāq, and so on. The numerous subtle variations in the original Arabic have been disregarded.

The table of contents at the beginning of each volume gives a brief survey of the topics dealt with in that particular volume. It also includes the headings and subheadings as they appear in Ṭabarī's text, as well as those occasionally introduced by the translator.

Well-known place-names, such as Mecca, Baghdad, Jerusalem, Damascus, and the Yemen, are given in their English spellings. Less common place-names, which are the vast majority, are transliterated. Biblical figures appear in the accepted English spelling. Iranian names are usually transcribed according to their Arabic forms, and the presumed Iranian forms are often discussed in the footnotes.

Technical terms have been translated wherever possible, but some, such as *imām* and *dirham*, have been retained in Arabic forms. Others that cannot be translated with sufficient precision have been retained and italicized as well as footnoted.

The annotation aims chiefly at clarifying difficult passages, identifying individuals and place-names, and discussing textual difficulties. Much leeway has been left to the translators to include in the footnotes whatever they consider necessary and helpful. Initially, each volume was to have a brief, general introduction; however, after the first few volumes, it was deemed useful to expand the scope of the introductions so that they would include a discussion of the historical context of the volumes and Ṭabarī's method of relating the events. Again, it was left to the translators to decide what was pertinent and helpful to say in their introductions. Translators were also encouraged to provide maps and genealogical tables.

Rather than give further detail of the editorial policy and principles, I reproduce here, for those who may be interested, the Guidelines set forth by the Editorial Board.

Guidelines for Translation, Annotation, and Indexing

I. Translation

1. The purpose of the translation is to provide an accurate but literate text.
2. Mecca, Baghdad, Jerusalem, Damascus, Aleppo, Medina and the

like retain their accepted English forms. Less well-known place names are to be romanized accurately.

3. Amīr al-mu'minīn should be rendered "Commander of the Faithful". The English spelling "Caliph" is retained.

4. *Bāya'a*, *bay'ah* should be consistently translated as "to give/render the oath of allegiance".

5. Familiar technical terms, when reasonably accurate English equivalents are available, should be translated; thus, vizier (*wazīr*), judge (*qāḍī*), cubit (*dhirā'*). Other technical terms should be retained in transliteration without italics, e.g., muftī, imām, ṣūfī, dirham (drachma), dīnār (denarius), shaikh. In general, Arabic terms should be avoided as much as possible.

When a less familiar term like *dihqān* is left untranslated, an explanatory footnote with reference to the secondary literature (usually *Et*) may be called for. Unfamiliar and untranslatable technical terms, e.g., *raṭl* or *dāniq*, should be rendered in italics and footnoted.

6. Referents should be supplied for pronouns as required by English usage.

7. It is unnecessary to translate the common terms of blessing after God, the Prophet, etc., except when the formula has some special import.

8. It is not always obligatory to follow the exact sequence of Arabic syntax or literary style; this should be determined by the text and idiomatic English usage. Occasionally, it may be useful to turn direct Arabic speech into indirect speech in the translation to enable the English text to flow smoothly. However, direct speech adds to the liveliness of the translation and preserves the flavor of the original text; thus it should be retained unless other considerations prevail.

II. Annotation

1. Annotations are meant to provide a better understanding of the text. Proper names as well as technical terms unfamiliar to the non-specialist require annotation.

2. A search should be made for relevant parallel sources, and these should be cited when deemed necessary.
3. Philological and stylistic comments are for the benefit of the Arabist. They should be limited to explicating the text where it presents problems.
4. Major geographical areas, e.g., Ḥijāz, Khurāsān, Sind require no comment. Less well-known places should be identified by referring to the secondary literature, such as *EI*, *EIr*, Le Strange, Yāqūt's *Mu'jam al-Buldān*, or Schwartz's *Iran*. Fuller comments are necessary only when identification of a particular place is critical to understanding the sense of the text.
5. In rare cases when the explication of the text requires more extensive treatment, this should take the form of an excursus at the end of the translation.
6. Maximum space allowed for the annotation of each volume, including excursuses, should not exceed about one-third of the text.
7. Authors should be cited by name only, except in those cases where the same author has written other works likely to be cited. Thus, Ṭabarī III/I, 250 but Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rīkh* (Leiden), I, 250 or Ya'qūbī, *Buldān* (BGA, VIII), 250.
8. Titles should be abbreviated and follow the format of *EI*² and *EIr* (but with the romanization used in this series).
9. References should generally be to standard editions. Where several editions exist, the translators should indicate their choice.
10. Passages that pose textual problems should be romanized and reproduced in footnotes.

III. Editions of the Arabic Text

The Leiden edition should serve as the basis of the translation (see above, p. x). The Cairo edition should, however, be consulted and, if the Topkapı Sarayı manuscripts used in this edition differ significantly from the Leiden edition, the difference should be taken into account and footnoted.

IV. Format and Style

A. General

1. The pagination of the Leiden edition is to be indicated in the margin in square brackets.
2. Hijrah dates are always given with corresponding Western dates; the two are separated by a /, e.g., 145/762.
3. Chains of transmission (*isnād*) should be introduced by "according to" followed by the names of the transmitters in sequence, separated by a —, with a colon after the last name; e.g., "According to Abū Ja'far—Muḥammad b. 'Umar—Muḥammad b. Šāliḥ."
4. *Kunyah* and *nisbah* are always romanized and not translated, e.g., Abū al-Ḥasan al-Khayyāt (not "Father of al-Ḥasan the Tailor").
5. Translations are followed by a bibliography giving full publication details for all works cited.
6. The translation of a *bayt* consisting of two hemistichs should be typed as two lines. The first line should begin with a capital letter and be indented; the second line should be further indented and begin with a lower case (small) letter, unless the first line ends with a period, in which case the second line should begin with a capital letter. If any of the hemistichs exceeds one line, the remainder is placed on the next line and is similarly indented. *Bayts* should be separated by an extra space.

B. Rubrics

1. Reigns of Caliphs should be capitalized, e.g.

THE CALIPHATE OF MARWĀN B. MUḤAMMAD

2. The year should be capitalized and beneath it the equivalent Western date should be given parentheses, e.g.,

THE YEAR 280
(March 23, 893—March 12, 894)

When indicated in the text add:

The Events of This Year

3. Other rubrics should be rendered as English titles and underlined, e.g.,

The Reason for...

4. Rubrics may often be cumbersome and difficult to translate, particularly when introduced by "mention of" or the like. In the interest of brevity, one may omit this element of the formula, e.g., instead of:

Mention of the Accounts Concerning the Death of...

translate:

The Death of...

5. The form for rubrics that merge with the text is:

The Reason for this was the killing of...

C. Pre-Islamic Names and Letters

Ancient Iranian names should be romanized according to their Arabic spelling. For biblical names, the standard English forms (see *The Westminster Bible Dictionary*) should be used. Classical names are to be rendered according to standard English practice.

In the case of titles, it will at times be desirable to put the original forms in brackets after the translation, e.g., "general" (*iṣbahbadh*).

D. Paragraphs

Translators may exercise considerable license in paragraphing; however, the introduction of an *isnād* as a rule calls for a new paragraph.

Occasionally, transmitters insert lengthy addresses, sermons, doc-

uments, etc. into the text. These should be set off in special paragraphs in quotation marks. Key short passages of this kind need not be set off.

V. *The Index*

A. Contents

1. There is to be only one index.
2. It should be as complete as possible (too much is better than too little).
3. It should contain:
 - a. All personal proper names in Ṭabarī's text.
 - b. All geographical names (cities, countries, rivers, etc.) in Ṭabarī's text.
 - c. All personal and geographical names in the notes as far as they refer to the medieval context. For instance, if a note states that M.b.A. al-Baghdādī is not identical with the M.b.A. al-Kūfī mentioned by Ṭabarī, M.b.A. al-Baghdādī requires a separate entry in the index.

References to medieval sources are also to be included. Thus, if Miskawayh is cited in the note, "Miskawayh" will appear in the index.

However, proper names of modern scholars are not to be included. With respect to the notes, some selective judgment will be needed; however, if in doubt, add!

B. Form

1. Place a capital A, B, etc. at the head of each new letter of the alphabet.
2. The definite article is to be disregarded for purposes of alphabetization. al-Ṭabarī thus appears under Ṭ, but "al-" is retained.
3. If an entry under Ibn is needed, it should appear under I. Thus: Ibn M. (The same applies to Bint).
4. Abū M. appears under A. (Also Akhū; Umm under U).

5. The main entry of a name with page references is listed under the forms of the name considered to be most characteristic. Of course, the "most characteristic" form is not always obvious; one's choice may be arbitrary at times. If different forms of an individual's name appear in the text, all must be listed separately, with cross references to the main entry. For instance, assuming that Ṭabarī appears in the text or the notes under the various components of his name, the following entries are needed:

Abū Ja'far, see al-Ṭabarī

Ibn Jarīr, see al-Ṭabarī

Muḥammad b. Jarīr, see al-Ṭabarī

al-Ṭabarī (Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr), 35, 46, 109 (n.83), 72

In the main entry, the other forms of the name should be repeated; however, it is not necessary to supply them where they do not occur. Thus "Miskawayh" is sufficient; his given names need not be supplied.

VI. General

1. The translators are expected to provide a substantial introduction that places the volume in historical perspective. The introduction may contain not only a summary of the volume's contents, but also comments on the significance of the events, an evaluation of Ṭabarī's reporting, and a discussion of parallel sources.

2. Maps and genealogical tables are helpful, in fact, welcome, provided the translator is able to furnish them.

E.Y.



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My foremost thanks to the National Endowment for the Humanities and its Division of Research Programs for their continued support and encouragement.

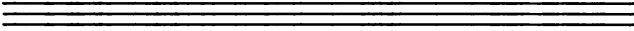
I also wish to thank sincerely the participating scholars, who have made the realization of this project possible; the Board of Editors for their valuable assistance; Professor Franz Rosenthal for his many helpful suggestions in the formulation and application of the editorial policy; Professors C.E. Bosworth and Jacob Lassner for their painstaking and meticulous editing; Professor Michael Morony of the University of California at Los Angeles for undertaking the task of dividing the text into volume portions; and Dr. Susan Mango, formerly of the National Endowment for the Humanities, and her successor, Dr. Martha Chomiak, for their genuine interest in the project and their advocacy of it.

I am grateful to the State University of New York Press for volunteering to undertake the publication of the series; to its Director, Mr. William D. Eastman, for showing himself earnestly committed to the project; and to Professor Said Arjomand, the editor of the Middle Eastern Series of SUNY Press, for bringing the project to the attention of the Board of the Press.

Special thanks are due to Dina Amin, who as Executive Secretary has managed with great care the administrative aspects of the project, and to Mrs. Patsy King of Columbia University's Office of Projects and Grants for her patient handling of the bureaucratic matters pertaining to the project. I trust that the completion of

the project and the publication of the index volume will provide me with a second opportunity to express my gratitude to others who have assisted the project.

E.Y.



General Introduction



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Translator's Foreword



This volume contains the first part of the Ṭabari translation, a biographical sketch, and a discussion of what can be said at present about Ṭabari's literary output, as well as some remarks on the English translation of the History. Much work remains to be done before all the data are clarified and Ṭabari's works and his intellectual position in his environment have been fully studied. Although considerable effort has been expended to this end in recent years, it can truly be said that the task has just begun.

It has been deemed advisable that the General Introduction and the translation of Volume I be kept as separate as possible, even if they appear under the same cover. However, continuous pagination has been adopted, and entries for the Bibliography and for the Index have been combined. On the other hand, the numbering of footnotes starts afresh in the Translation. Therefore, in the General Introduction, cross-references to footnotes in the Translation are prefaced by "translation." Inversely, in the Translation, cross-references to footnotes in the General Introduction are marked accordingly. In view of the different character of this volume as compared to the other volumes of this series, the Index should, perhaps, have been considerably modified, but this has been done only to a very small degree, as stated in the note at the head of the Index.

Some of Ṭabari's works still in manuscript have remained inaccessible to me. I am grateful to the Escorial Library for having provided me with a microfilm of the manuscript of *Tabṣīr* and to

the Beinecke Library of Yale University for making me a copy of the Ṭabarī biography from the Landberg manuscript of Ibn 'Asākir. I have discussed the "praiseworthy position" (below, 71 ff.) with a number of colleagues—foremost among them Josef van Ess to whom I am indebted for essential references. Gerhard Böwering helped me out with a xerox from his copy of the biography of Ṭabarī in Dhahabī's *Nubalā'*. My former student, Dr. Elise Crosby, was instrumental in obtaining for me a copy of the *Ḥadīth al-himyān*. Yale University Library and its former Near East librarian Dr. Jonathan Rodgers have been as helpful to me in connection with this work as the library staff has always been during the past thirty years.

Franz Rosenthal



The Life and Works of al-Ṭabarī



A Remark on the Sources

The information we have on Ṭabarī's life and works is unusually instructive in a number of ways, but it leaves many large gaps in our knowledge. Important questions have to be asked for which no definite answers are available. In writing his biography, it is also necessary, and has been attempted here, to distinguish as clearly as possible between securely known data and what appears to be valid information but in fact remains the result of unverifiable speculation.¹

Ṭabarī shows himself very reluctant to talk about his personal life, at least in the preserved works, which constitute only part of his large literary production. Although it is by no means certain, he may have revealed more about his personal situation in some of his lost writings, for instance, the original *Dhayl al-mudhayyal* in which he discussed his teachers.² He does provide his biographer with the names of numerous scholars with whom he had personal contact. There can be no doubt that the "I was told" and "we were told" at the opening of the chains of transmitters³ have as a rule to be taken literally as indicating direct personal contact or contact within the setting of public lectures and instruction. In most cases, however, it is unfortunately not clear how close such

1. Biographical notices such as the one by R. Paret in the first edition of *EI*, s. v. al-Ṭabarī (see also *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 556 f.), contain the elementary data and may serve for quick information.

2. See below, 89 f. For the *Ḥadīth al-himyān*, see below, 98 ff.; whatever one may think about its genuineness, it does not qualify as a "work by" Ṭabarī.

3 See below, 147.

contact may have been. Knowledge of the circle of individuals among whom Ṭabarī moved is invaluable for understanding the events of his life. It has been imperative therefore to try to learn as much as possible about his authorities, colleagues, students, and acquaintances, and to establish their relations with him. Conversely, where it proved impossible to identify an individual, we are left in the dark with respect to potentially important, even crucial, nexuses.

As a scholar convinced of the preeminence of the material with which he dealt, Ṭabarī was not inclined to waste time and space on such mundane matters as when and where he had contact with his authorities. Occasionally, he might very well have indicated such data, for it was the custom to keep notes including the name of a teacher and the time of attendance at his classes. In fact, Ṭabarī did so as a young student; he may have continued the custom later in his life, but for his own information and not for publication.⁴ It must also be assumed that he often referred to someone with whom he undoubtedly had some personal contact; but later, he used the source that was transmitted to him by that individual in its written (published) form and quoted from it while pretending all the time to rely upon oral transmission. This was no doubt the manner in which he handled quotations in *Tafsīr* from earlier Qur'ān commentaries. It also seems very likely that he relied on written (but presumably unpublished) "books" when transmitting information that had been preserved as the heirloom of a particular family such as that of Muhammad b. Sa'd.⁵ In certain cases, the function of Ṭabarī's direct informant seems to have been hardly more than to legitimize the use of a recension of a work in its written form, as in those of Aḥmad b. Thābit al-Rāzī as the transmitter of Abū Ma'shar,⁶ or of al-Sarī b. Yahyā as a transmitter of Sayf b. 'Umar.⁷ Al-Sarī, it should be noted, transmitted Sayf's historical information to Ṭabarī by written communication; under the circumstances, it is rather doubtful whether there was indeed personal contact between him and Ṭabarī where

4. See *Irshād*, VI, 431, ed. Rifā'i, XVIII, 51, and below, 21.

5. See below, translation, n. 337.

6. See Sezgin, *GAS*, I, 292; Ṭabarī, *History*, I, 1141 and frequently. It seems uncertain whether Aḥmad b. Thābit al-Rāzī is identical with the person listed in Ibn Abi Hātim, I, 1, 44; Ibn Hajar, *Lisān*, I, 143, as suggested in Sezgin, *GAS*, I, 796.

7. See Sezgin, *GAS*, I, 311 f.

the formula "he told me/us" is used.⁸

In sum, we are faced with the fact that Ṭabarī's own works, as far as they are preserved, are a very limited source of hard biographical data. They do provide us with many important leads, and they are of the greatest value to us because they reveal his scholarly personality and attitude.

No biographies of any length appear to have been written during Ṭabarī's lifetime, but there were a number of men who had known him personally and who wrote on his life and works.

Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. Kāmil (260–350/873[4]–961),⁹ who had a distinguished career as a judge and productive scholar, was on familiar terms with him. He was among those present when Ṭabarī died. An early follower of Ṭabarī's legal school, he seems to have veered away from it later in his life.¹⁰ His monograph became a prime source for Ṭabarī biographers.

While Ibn Kāmil's prominence earned him obituary notices in a number of reference works, another individual who wrote a biography and seems to have been close to Ṭabarī, Abū Muḥammad 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Muḥammad al-Ṭabarī, remains obscure. We can place neither him nor his supposed monograph.¹¹

Abū Muḥammad 'Abdallāh b. Aḥmad b. Ja'far al-Farghānī (282–362/895[6]–972[3]),¹² prepared an edition of Ṭabarī's *History* and wrote a continuation (*Ṣilah*) to it. He had personal contact with Ṭabarī as a student, but it is difficult for us to say how extensive this contact may have been. He devoted a long obituary notice to Ṭabarī in his *Ṣilah*, which served as an important source

8. As, for instance, Ṭabarī, *History*, I, 1845, 1848, 1851, etc., as against the use of the verb "to write" in I, 1749, 1921, etc. Written information from a certain 'Alī b. Aḥmad b. al-Ḥasan al-Tijlī is mentioned in Ṭabarī, *History*, I, 1311. See also, in particular, the reference to Ziyād b. Ayyūb in I, 3159, below, n. 210. See also below, n. 455, on al-Mas'ūdi's relationship with Ṭabarī.

9. See Sezgin, *GAS*, I, 523 f. We cannot pinpoint the exact location of Ibn Kāmil's East Baghdad residence on Shāri' 'Abd al-Ṣamad in Suwayqat Abī Ubaydallāh (see *TB*, IV, 357, l. 11; Miskawayh, in *Eclipse*, II, 184; Lassner, *Topography*, 78–80). It was probably closer to Ṭabarī's mosque in Sūq al-'Aṭash than to his home. Miskawayh, who made very extensive use of *History*, studied the work with Ibn Kāmil. He read some of it to him and received his permission (*ijāzah*) to use the rest, see *Eclipse*, II, 184. Cf. J. Kraemer, *Humanism*, 223.

10. See below, nn. 251 and 301.

11. His work, as that of Ibn Kāmil, is specifically stated by Yāqūt to have been a monograph, see *Irshād*, VI, 462, ed. Rifā'i, XVIII, 94.

12. See Sezgin, *GAS*, I, 337, and *History*, translation, Vol. XXXVIII, xv, n. 7.

of biographical information. Another valuable document from al-Farghānī's hand is an *ijāzah* giving permission to a certain 'Alī b. 'Imrān and (?) a certain Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad to teach a number of Ṭabarī's works which al-Farghānī himself had studied with Ṭabarī. It was originally affixed to a volume of *Tafsīr*, no doubt the one used by the mentioned student(s), and dated from Sha'bān 336/February–March 948.¹³

Another follower of Ṭabarī's legal school inserted much information on Ṭabarī in his historical work that depended on (continued?) Ṭabarī's work. We know not much more about him than his name, Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b. Ḥabīb al-Saqāṭī al-Ṭabarī. He can be assumed to have lived while Ṭabarī was still alive.¹⁴

Among those who were born during Ṭabarī's lifetime but had no personal contact with him, the Egyptian historian Abū Sa'īd b. Yūnus (281–347/894–958) may be mentioned. It was natural for him to include a notice on Ṭabarī in his work on "Strangers in Egypt," because Ṭabarī had visited Egypt for purposes of study.¹⁵ Others in his generation who wrote biographical works would certainly not have overlooked a man of Ṭabarī's stature. However, as far as our information goes, another biography in monograph form was not written for about three hundred years, at which time the Egyptian scholar al-Qifṭī (568–646/1172–1248) compiled a Ṭabarī biography, entitled *al-Taḥrīr fī akhbār Muḥammad b. Jarīr*.¹⁶ Al-Qifṭī was a great admirer of Ṭabarī, for he not only wrote this monograph but took the opportunity to list Ṭabarī in other works of his, such as his dictionaries of grammarians and of poets named Muḥammad; neither work, especially the latter, necessarily required mention of Ṭabarī.

None of the early biographies, including al-Qifṭī's monographs, has come down to us. We have to rely on excerpts preserved by later scholars. These excerpts give us some idea of the contents of those biographies, and they furnish the most reliable information at our disposal. Among the biographical sources that are

13. The text of the *ijāzah* is quoted in *Irshād*, VI, 426 f., ed. Rifā'ī, XVIII, 44 f. Two recipients of the *ijāzah* seem to be mentioned, but a singular pronoun is used to refer to them.

14. See Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 235, l. 24.

15. Ibn Yūnus is referred to in connection with Ṭabarī by Ibn 'Asākir, LXXII, and Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt*, IV, 192. For Ibn Yūnus, see *El*², III, 969b, s. v.

16. See Qifṭī, *Inbāh*, III, 90, and *Muḥammadūn*, 264.

preserved, the oldest is the *History of Baghdad* by al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (392–463/1002–71), cited here as *TB*.¹⁷ The Khaṭīb's biographical notice was quoted by practically all later biographers. Since Ṭabarī spent some time in Damascus on his western journey, Ibn 'Asākir (499–571/1105–76) devoted to him a long and informative entry in his *History of Damascus*. He went beyond *TB* and added much information from the old sources.¹⁸ By far the most extensive coverage of Ṭabarī's life and works is the one we owe to the great geographer and biographer Yāqūt. He was a contemporary and long-term associate of al-Qiftī, whose enthusiasm for Ṭabarī he apparently shared. Yāqūt's article on Ṭabarī in his *Dictionary of learned men and litterateurs*, cited here as *Irshād*, reproduces long excerpts from the old sources. It seems that he quotes them quite literally. The available text is not free from mistakes. In all likelihood, however, they do not affect anything essential.¹⁹

Ṭabarī's fame was such that no biographer in subsequent centuries who touched on Ṭabarī's age and fields of scholarly activity could afford not to mention him. Biographical notices are numerous, if often quite perfunctory. Some provide valuable bits of additional information not found elsewhere, but that is rare.²⁰ As a rule, they do not offer noteworthy biographical data beyond what is found in the works of al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, Ibn 'Asākir, and Yāqūt. Among the longer notices, reference may be made here, without prejudice, to those in the *Muntaẓam* (VI,

17. See *TB*, II, 162–9.

18. Attention to Ibn 'Asākir's biography of Ṭabarī was first drawn by Goldziher, "Die literarische Thätigkeit." In a letter to T. Nöldeke, he mentions that this edition was a difficult task, see Róbert Simon, *Ignác Goldziher*, 197. Goldziher published only the part dealing with Ṭabarī's works. The manuscript he used is now in the Yale University Library, Ms. L-312 (Cat. Nemoj 1182), fols. 109a–117b. On the basis of the same manuscript, the complete text was published in Ṭabarī, *Introductio etc.*, LXIX–XCVI, with comparison with and additions from other biographies, in particular, those of Ibn al-Jawzī, *Muntaẓam*, and al-Maqrizī, *Muqaffā*, also Subki, *Tabaqāt*, as well as brief passages from al-Dhahabī and al-Nawawī. (Al-Dhahabī's source is now available, see Mu'āfā, *Jalīs*, I, 472, quoted in *TB*, X, 98 f., in the biography of Ibn al-Mu'tazz, see below, n. 464).

19. See *Irshād*, VI, 423–62, ed. Rifā'ī, XVIII, 40–94. Rifā'ī offers some suggestions and corrections. For Yāqūt's sources, see Bergsträsser, "Quellen," 201 f. For his biography, see Sellheim, "Neue Materialien," 87–118, and *Materialien zur arabischen Literaturgeschichte*, I, 226–31.

20. See, for instance, below, n. 123.

170–2) of Ibn al-Jawzī (507–97/1126–1200), the *Nubalā'* (XIV, 267–82) of al-Dhahabī (673–748/1274–1348),²¹ and the large *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyyah* (III, 120–8) of Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī (727–71/1327–70). Other works have, of course, been mentioned here wherever indicated.²²

Not surprisingly, the critical evaluation of the available material presents difficult problems. The reports we have are expectedly partial to Ṭabarī. In fact, they can be suspected of an attempt to idealize him. Since Ṭabarī expressed views on nearly every aspect of religion, law, and society, he inevitably made many enemies. They left no biographical notices known to us, and their views are rarely heard.²³ We may question whether the anecdotes told about him actually occurred and whether he did in fact do all the things and make all the remarks attributed to him. Furthermore, there was, and is, the temptation to suppose that a famous person had contact with any other famous person in his time and place. Thus, there is occasionally some doubt as to whether the individuals named in anecdotes, on which we must rely for reconstructing some of the data of Ṭabarī's life, were accurately reported.²⁴ In view of these and other difficulties, the only sound procedure is the one followed here: Unless there is irrefutable proof to the contrary, we must assume that the reports reflect reality, and that idealizing descriptions depict, if not reality, then something equally or more important, namely, the perception of contemporaries. In either case, they provide legitimate material for the biographer, to be used, it is true, with appropriate caution.

His Early Life

Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī was born in Āmul, the principal capital city of Ṭabaristān, located in the lowlands of the

21. Al-Dhahabī had occasion to come back to Ṭabarī in other works. His *Ta'rikh al-Islām* presumably contained a lengthy obituary notice. It was not available to me.

22. For instance, the biographies in Ibn Khallikān and al-Nawawī were already edited and translated by Hamaker, *Specimen*, 21–32. For Ḥājji Khalifah and d'Herbelot, see, in particular, below, 138.

23. Some hostile Ḥanbalite information seems to have entered the biographical mainstream; see below, 73 f.

24. The often crucial dates for individuals connected with Ṭabarī are unfortunately not always as certain as we might wish; see below, translation, v f.

region at a distance of about twenty kilometers from the southern shore of the Caspian.²⁵ It was sometime during the winter of A.D. 839, when al-Mu'taṣim ruled as caliph in Baghdad. Ṭabarī himself was not quite sure whether his birth fell near the end of the hijrah year 224 or in the beginning of 225. According to local memory, it coincided with some noteworthy happening, but those whom he asked at some later time in his life were uncertain what that happening had been. Ṭabaristān certainly went through an eventful time at this period of its history, though the political circumstances may not have been responsible for the particular happening by which Ṭabarī's birth was remembered. In the years 224 and 225, the governor of the region, Māziyār b. Qārīn, a recent convert to Islam and a member of the Bāwandid dynasty who were still non-Muslims,²⁶ rebelled against control by the Ṭāhirid dynasty of governors and thus against the central authorities of the caliphate. In the course of the rebellion, heavy taxes were placed upon the landowners of Āmul, and the city itself was laid waste. We do not know in which way and to what degree these events affected Ṭabarī's family. It is possible that the attempt to levy new taxes on farms and real estate had a temporary unsettling effect on it. With the victory of the Ṭāhirids, Āmul seems to have entered upon a prosperous phase of its history.

Ṭabarī retained close ties to his hometown throughout his life. At some later date, he wrote an essay detailing his religious principles, and addressed it to the people of Ṭabaristān. He felt that erroneous doctrines, such as those propounded by Mu'tazilites and Khārijites, were spreading there.²⁷ Shī'ah influence also was strong. 'Alids and their supporters achieved political hegemony when the Zaydī dynasty came into power in 250/864. Probably about 290/903, on his second (and, apparently, last) of his recorded visits home, his outspoken defense of the virtues of the first two caliphs against Shī'ah attacks caused him much trouble. Reportedly, he had to leave the region in a great hurry. An old man who had given him timely warning of the danger awaiting him was severely beaten by the authorities; cognizant of his indebtedness

25. See "Āmol" in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, I, 980 f.

26. See "Bāwand" in *El*², I, 1110. On the Ṭāhirids, see, for instance, C.E. Bosworth, in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, IV, 90 ff.

27. On *Tabṣīr*, below, 126 f.

to him, Ṭabarī had him brought to Baghdad where he treated him hospitably.²⁸ There may be no special significance to the fact that men from Ṭabaristān were rather numerous in the historian's circle of acquaintances and that *History* pays a good deal of attention to events in Ṭabaristān, but it could be another indication of Ṭabarī's attachment to the land of his birth.

Information on the more remote history of Ṭabarī's family is restricted to the names of his ancestors on his father's side. Yazīd is reasonably well-established as the name of his grandfather. It is mentioned regularly, and it also occurs in Ṭabarī's own works, though rarely and with somewhat doubtful authenticity.²⁹ Beyond Yazīd, the names of Ṭabarī's great-grandfather and great-great-grandfather appear as Kathīr b. Ghālib in one tradition, while another less common one knows only of a great-grandfather named Khālīd.³⁰ These are all good Arabic Muslim names and as such contain no hint at ancient non-Muslim roots on his father's side. They would lead into the mid-second/eighth century before Ṭabaristān came, in a way, fully under Muslim control. It is thus not entirely excluded, if far from certain, that Ṭabarī's paternal forebears were Muslim colonists who migrated to Āmul and settled there at some date. Ṭabarī himself discouraged speculation about his ancestry. When he was asked by a certain Muḥammad b. Ja'far b. Jumhūr³¹ about his ancestry, he replied by quoting a verse of Ru'bah b. al-'Ajjāj, in which the famous Umayyad poet deprecated pride in one's pedigree.

(My father) al-'Ajjāj has established my reputation,³² so call me

28. See *Irshād*, VI, 456, ed. Rifā'i, XVIII, 85 f.

29. We can never be sure whether "b. Yazīd" goes back to Ṭabarī's own text or was added in the course of the manuscript transmission. See *Tafsīr*, III, 107, l. 14 (beginning of sūrah 3). The subscription of the ancient manuscript of *Ikhtilāf*, ed. Schacht, x, refers to Yazīd, but the text later on (p. 242) does not have it. It is, however, frequent in Kern's edition of *Ikhtilāf*.

30. Thus Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 234, l. 9. His source was al-Mu'āfā, who might have had reliable information; still, the majority opinion seems to be correct. See also Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt*, IV, 191.

31. He cannot be further identified. He appears to have been a follower of Ṭabarī's school. His name is given only in Ibn 'Asākir, LXXIII f., who indicates that his information goes back to al-Mu'āfā.

32. Cf. Qur. 94:4. Ru'bah's *Dīwān* does not have "my." A reading *dhikrā*, and not *dhikrī*, has nothing to recommend itself.

by my name (alone)! When long pedigrees are given
(for others), it suffices me.³³

Perhaps, Ṭabarī wished to express disdain for the view that merit was based upon ancestry rather than individual accomplishment (even if Ru'bah's verse is not a good example for it). This was a topic hotly debated in Islam at all times. On the other hand, it could merely mean that Ṭabarī did not have memorable ancestors whom he knew about or cared for.

A strange family relationship was claimed for Ṭabarī on the basis of a couple of verses ascribed to the well-known poet Abū Bakr (Muḥammad b. al-'Abbās) al-Khuwārizmī, whose death is placed about 383/993 or a decade later.³⁴ The verses speak about the poet's relationship to the "Jarīr family (*banū Jarīr*)."³⁵ He states that he was born in Āmul and boasts that the Banū Jarīr were 'Alid extremists (*rāfiḍī*) through the female lineage (*'an kalālah*), while he himself was a *rāfiḍī* by paternal inheritance.³⁵ The relationship was supposed to be as close as that of nephew and uncle (?), which would be chronologically impossible. The little we know about Ṭabarī's family does not support such a relationship or the existence of an extended "Jarīr family." As suggested by Yāqūt, the connection of the verses with the historian may have been the work of hostile Ḥanbalites who wished to brand him as a Shī'ite. But we also hear from a Shī'ite source that the other Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, whose grandfather's name was Rustam and who was the likely author of *al-Mustarshid* (see below, 118 f.), applied the verses to himself, with the difference that he claimed maternal relationship while someone else claimed paternal lineage for their Shī'ah loyalties.³⁶ At any rate, the story can be safely disregarded as absurd and unhistorical, as far as Ṭabarī is concerned.

His father, Jarīr, was a man of property, although he was not

33. See Ru'bah, *Dīwān*, 160, no. 57, ll. 8 f., translation, 215; Ibn 'Asākir (above, n. 31); *Irshād*, VI, 428, ed. Rifā'i, XVIII, 47.

34. See Sezgin, *GAS*, II, 635 f. Abū Bakr al-Khuwārizmī was also called al-Ṭabarkhazī, because his father came from Khuwārizm and his mother from Ṭabaristān; see Sam'ānī, *Ansāb*, IX, 37 f.; Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt*, IV, 400; and Ṣafādī, *Wāfi*, III, 191. See further *EP*², IV, 1069, s.v. al-Kh^wārazmī.

35. See Yāqūt, *Mu'jam*, I, 68. Yāqūt rejects the story as malicious Ḥanbalite slander picked up by the Shī'ah poet, but it appears to have been accepted by scholars such as Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt*, IV, 192, and Ṣafādī, *Wāfi*, II, 284, III, 192.

36. See Ibn Abi al-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ*, I, 301.

rich. As long as he lived, he provided his son with an income, and Ṭabarī inherited (his share of) the estate after his father's death, the date of which is not known to us. According to an anecdote placed in the time of the wazirate of Muḥammad b. 'Ubaydallāh b. Khāqān, who became wazīr in 299/912, even at that late period of Ṭabarī's life, the pilgrim caravan brought the proceeds from his lands (*ḍay'ah*) in Ṭabaristān to Baghdad—as usual, it seems, in the form of merchandise rather than cash. It was Ṭabarī's custom to use the occasion to make gifts to friends and acquaintances to whom he was obligated. This time, he selected³⁷ a sable estimated to be worth fifty dīnārs, wrapped it up in a large parcel, and had it conveyed to the wazīr, who was surprised when the parcel was opened in his presence and he saw the valuable gift. He accepted it, but he indicated that he did not want Ṭabarī to give any more such presents to him in the future. On his part, Ṭabarī had intended the precious fur as a countergift for one the wazīr had offered him, and it was to serve as a hint that as a matter of principle, he felt he could not accept any large gifts from the wazīr or anybody else.³⁸

The modest degree of financial independence which Ṭabarī enjoyed throughout his life enabled him as a student to travel, and it gave him some freedom to follow his scholarly and moral ideals when he was an established scholar and other potential sources of income were readily at his disposal. Living and traveling at rather large distances from his source of income, it could happen that his father's stipend did not reach him on time, and he experienced some temporary inconvenience. Once, he was forced to sell some of his garments, such as the long sleeves characteristic of the scholar's robe.³⁹ In Egypt, he and his friends even had to go

37. Yāqūt is not very clear as to whether Ṭabarī bought the fur from the proceeds or whether it was part of the merchandise he had received. There is good reason to assume the latter. It could conceivably suggest that the total value of the merchandise was substantial.

38. See *Irshād*, VI, 457 f., ed. Rifā'i, XVIII, 88 f. The informants here, Abū al-Ṭayyib al-Qāsim b. Ahmad b. al-Shā'ir and Sulaymān b. al-Khāqānī (if these are the correct forms of their names), cannot be identified. Ṭabarī's attitude toward gifts will come up repeatedly here, as it is a recurrent motif in his biography. The exchange of gifts played an important role in Muslim society and found much attention among jurists (see, for instance *El*², III, 342-40, s. v. *hiba*). For Ṭabarī's views on the acceptance of gifts from non-Muslims—a subject that had major political implications—one may compare his discussion in *Tahdhib*, *Musnad 'Alī*, 207-21.

39. See below, n. 69. Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Taqdimah*, 363 f., reports a similar experi-

hungry until a local dignitary miraculously came to their rescue and sent them a large amount of money.⁴⁰

At a young age, Ṭabarī displayed his precociousness, which was remarkable even in a world where precociousness was not unusual and was carefully nurtured by parents and teachers. As an old man probably in his seventies, he recalled that he knew the Qur'ān by heart when he was seven, served as prayer leader when he was eight, and studied (lit., "wrote down") traditions of the Prophet when he was nine. This remark may sound a little boastful, but there is no reason to doubt it. The words appear to be those actually used when he wanted to convince the father of a nine-year-old boy, the young son of his future biographer Ibn Kāmil, that it was not too early for Ibn Kāmil to have the boy study with him and that he should not use the boy's tender years and lack of preparation (*qillat al-adab*) as an excuse for not doing so. In order to stress his point, he told Ibn Kāmil of a dream which his own father had once had about his young son. "My father," Ṭabarī reminisced, "had a dream concerning me. He saw me standing before the Prophet with a bag filled with stones, and I was spreading some of them in front of him. A dream interpreter told my father that the dream signified that I would be a good Muslim as an adult and a strong defender of the religious law of the Prophet. As a consequence, my father was ready to support my studies ('my quest of knowledge' *ṭalab al-'ilm*) when I was still a small boy."⁴¹

Whether it was an actual dream or a literary fiction does not really matter. Dreams commonly served as a means to express basic convictions. In this case, the dream mirrored the desire of Ṭabarī's father to further his son's education, although he himself most likely had no specialized scholarly training. He encouraged him to leave home "in quest of knowledge," when he reached puberty (*tara'ra'a*). We are told reliably that young Ṭabarī left home

ence of his father.

40. See below, n. 109. It was, of course, nothing rare for students and many other young men to live on paternal bounty. Thus, Tanūkhī, *Faraj*, II, 179, tells about a Khurāsānian who every year received his annual allowance through the pilgrim caravan. Unable, or unwilling, to stretch it to last the entire year, he compiled debts to be paid off when next year's caravan arrived, only to get into a very tight situation when the caravan did not bring anything for him one year because his father had been seriously ill.

41. See *Irshād*, 429 f., ed. Rifāʿī, XVIII, 49. On Ṭabarī's good-humored banter with the boy's names on this occasion, see below, n. 163.

in 236/850-1, when he was only twelve.⁴² It often was a wrenching decision, especially for a mother, to send a child off to college, for this is what "traveling in quest of knowledge" really meant in cases of young boys such as Ṭabarī. The situation was aggravated by the fact that there were no organized "colleges" in his day (as there were in later centuries) which could have provided institutional support. Providing for proper living arrangements for the youngsters was left to individuals, family connections, or, preferably, teachers. We know nothing about Ṭabarī's mother, not even if she was still alive when he left home. If she was, she might have felt like the mother of Ibn Bashshār, one of Ṭabarī's influential teachers, when her son was faced with the decision of going away to study. She did not want him to leave, and he heeded his mother's advice and stayed, at least for the time being. Later, he felt that it was on account of this act of filial piety that he was blessed with a successful career.⁴³

Young Ṭabarī left to receive his further schooling in the nearest metropolis, al-Rayy, on the site of present-day Teheran. The teachers in Āmul whom his father had engaged for him naturally did not measure up in prestige to those in al-Rayy. It was there that, during a stay of apparently close to five years, Ṭabarī received the intellectual formation that made him the scholar he was to become. There is no record of his having visited other scholarly centers before leaving for Baghdad, where he arrived "shortly after the death of Ibn Ḥanbal" in the latter half of 241, that is, late in 855 or early in the following year.⁴⁴ "Traveling in quest of knowledge" could mean brief visits to famous authorities. Frequently, however, and no doubt in the case of very young students such as Ṭabarī, it entailed an extended stay and the systematic attendance at regular courses rather than occasional lectures. A teacher would quiz his students in the evening on the material they had taken down during the day. When the students happened to take a course with a teacher who lived outside the city limits, they had to run back "like mad (*ka-al-majānīn*)" in order to be on time for

42. The source for the precise date is Maslamah b. al-Qāsim, as quoted by Ibn Hajar. See below, n. 123.

43. See *TB*, II, 102, ll. 3 f.

44. See *Irshād*, 430, l. 18, ed. Rifāʿī, XVIII, 50.

another class.⁴⁵

Most prominent among his teachers in al-Rayy was Ibn Ḥumayd. Abū 'Abdallāh Muḥammad b. Ḥumayd al-Rāzi⁴⁶ was in his seventies at the time, and he died a decade later, in 248/862. He became one of Ṭabarī's most frequently cited authorities. Ibn Ḥumayd had lectured in Baghdad and had been welcomed there by Ibn Ḥanbal, who is even said to have transmitted traditions on his authority. If it is correct that Ibn Ḥanbal's son 'Abdallāh (213–90/828[9]–903)⁴⁷ had studied with him, his stay in Baghdad cannot have been very much in the past, unless, of course, 'Abdallāh was a small child when he attended his lectures, which is quite possible. In Ṭabarī's time, Ibn Ḥumayd had apparently retired to his native city. We have no information that he returned to Baghdad during his remaining years, in which case Ṭabarī could have continued his studies with him there. Thus, the material he quoted on Ibn Ḥumayd's authority was acquired by him in al-Rayy. No doubt he filled his notebooks with it for future reference, but he can also be assumed to have checked it all against the books upon which Ibn Ḥumayd had based his teaching, and supplemented it from them.

Another teacher from Ṭabarī's days in al-Rayy was al-Muthannā b. Ibrāhīm, whose *nisbah* was al-Āmulī (rather than al-Ubullī as found in *Irshād*).⁴⁸ Practically nothing more is known about him, but he also served as an important source of information for Ṭabarī's writings. Another, even less-known teacher of Ṭabarī was a certain Aḥmad b. Ḥammād al-Dawlābī. His main claim to distinction was that he had been a student of the reputable Sufyān (b. 'Uyaynah).⁴⁹ It must be said that our lack of knowledge about these men does not mean that their standing in the world of contemporary scholarship was low in any respect.

It is significant that the instruction which Ṭabarī received from Ibn Ḥumayd in al-Rayy extended to the historical works of Ibn

45. See *Irshād*, 430, ed. Rifā'ī, XVIII, 49 f.

46. For Ibn Ḥumayd, see below, translation, n. 26. *Irshād*, VI, 424, l. 2. ed. Rifā'ī, XVIII, 41, l. 2, had Aḥmad for Muḥammad by mistake (misprint?).

47. See below, 70. For Ibn Ḥumayd's connection with Ibn Ḥanbal and the latter's son 'Abdallāh, see *TB*, II, 259, ll. 4 f., 12, and 260, ll. 4 f.

48. See below, translation, n. 179.

49. See *History*, below, I, 1806; *Tafsīr*, VI, 3, l. 21 (*ad Qur.* 4:148), XI, 94, l. 21 (*ad Qur.* 10:64), XVIII, 60, l. 8 (*ad Qur.* 24:5).

Ishāq, famous above all as the author of the life of Muḥammad (*al-Sīrah*). He thus learned about pre-Islamic and early Islamic history. Knowledge of it was needed by religious scholars in general. In Ṭabarī's case, more importantly, it would seem that in the process, the seeds were planted for his wider interest in history which later culminated in the writing of his great *History*. According to Yāqūt, Ibn Kāmil is supposed to have reported that it was under the guidance of the just-mentioned Aḥmad b. Ḥammād al-Dawlābī on the authority of Salamah⁵⁰ that Ṭabarī studied Ibn Ishāq's *Mubtada'* and *Maghāzī* and thus laid the groundwork for *History*.⁵¹ However, in *History* itself, the *isnād* is always Ibn Ḥumayd—Salamah—Ibn Ishāq. The reference to Ibn Ḥammād in this connection is no doubt a mistake, which, however, could hardly have occurred in Ibn Kāmil's original text but must have crept in during the course of transmission.⁵² Ṭabarī later on continued his study of Ibn Ishāq. In al-Kūfah, both Hannād b. al-Sarī and Abū Kurayb transmitted to him information from Ibn Ishāq according to another recension, that of Yūnus b. Bukayr (d. 199/814[5]).⁵³ At that time, Ṭabarī probably did not receive instruction in special courses devoted entirely to Ibn Ishāq. It was rather through incidental reference that he learned more about him there.

Ibn Ḥumayd's status as an authorized transmitter of Ibn Ishāq's *Maghāzī* through Salamah was attacked by an otherwise unknown 'Alī b. Mihrān. Ibn Mihrān claimed plagiarism on the part of Ibn Ḥumayd. According to him, Ibn Ḥumayd did not receive the material directly from Salamah but through him. Therefore, he contended, a certain Ishāq b. Manṣūr (possibly the bearer of the name who died in 251/865?), who had studied with Ibn Ḥumayd just like Ṭabarī, was right when he classified Ibn Ḥumayd as

50. For Salamah b. al-Faḍl, judge of al-Rayy, see below, translation, n. 49.

51. See *Irshād*, VI, 430, ed. Rifā'i, XVIII, 50.

52. It is possible that both Ibn Ḥammād and Ibn Ḥumayd (who also taught Qur'ān commentary) lectured on the same material from Salamah from Ibn Ishāq in al-Rayy at the same time, but it does not seem very likely.

53. For Hannād (below, translation, n. 71), see *History*, I, 970, and for Abū Kurayb (below, translation, n. 77), see *History*, II, 311, III, 52. For Ibn Bukayr's recension, see Sezgin, *GAS*, I, 289, and Ibn Hajar, *Tahdhīb*, XI, 434 f., where Hannād and Abū Kurayb are listed among Ibn Bukayr's transmitters.

a "liar."⁵⁴ Quarrels of this kind were not uncommon, but even if there was some truth to the accusation directed against Ibn Ḥumayd, it would in no way reflect upon Ibn Ḥumayd's decisive role in Ṭabarī's development as a scholar.

A continuation of his studies in the center of the Muslim world, the capital city of Baghdad, was a natural choice for Ṭabarī, who by then was not yet seventeen years old. Baghdad not only counted many of the greatest representatives of Muslim scholarship among its residents, but scholars as well as litterateurs also came to lecture there for longer or shorter periods. Many stopped over on their way to or, more commonly, from the pilgrimage to Mecca, offering students the opportunity to add to their store of knowledge. In fact, if we can believe the *Story of the Belt* (below, p. 99), Ṭabarī himself went on the pilgrimage in 240/855, possibly before his first arrival in Baghdad (and not in the time between his arrival in Baghdad and his study trip to southern Iraq). The date of Ṭabarī's arrival in Baghdad is fixed by the statement that what attracted him to Baghdad was the expectation to study with Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (164–241/780–855), but Ibn Ḥanbal died shortly before his arrival.⁵⁵ It cannot be entirely ruled out that this report was invented to defuse later Ḥanbalite animosity against Ṭabarī. There is, however, nothing inherently impossible in it, even though Ibn Ḥanbal was no longer fully active at the time. Ibn Ḥumayd might very well have suggested to his bright young student that it was advisable for him to profit from contact with the great traditionist, no matter how slight such contact would be.

Rather soon,⁵⁶ Ṭabarī left Baghdad in order to continue his study and research in the great towns south of Baghdad, al-Baṣrah and al-Kūfah, including Wāsiṭ on the way. A number of famous authorities, mostly men already at least in their seventies, lived and taught there. It would have been possible for Ṭabarī to make repeated trips while spending some time in between in Baghdad, but a student was hardly likely to do this; thus, it can be confidently

54. See *TB*, II, 262 f.

55. See above, n. 44.

56. The assumption of Hūfi, 35, that Ṭabarī left Baghdad right away seems unlikely. *Irshād*, VI, 430, ll. 19 f., ed. Rifā'i, XVIII, 50, states that he began to study in Baghdad and then left for al-Baṣrah. His tutorship, which has been assigned by me to a later date (see below, 21 f.), could conceivably fall into this time, but this would seem improbable.

assumed he undertook just one extended journey. The date when it started can be established with reasonable accuracy. Some of the authorities with whom he studied, such as the Baṣrans Ḥumayd b. Mas'adah, who is often quoted in *Tafsīr*, and Bishr b. Mu'adh al-'Aqadī,⁵⁷ died at the latest in 245/859–60; but one of the Kūfan scholars, Hannād b. al-Sarī, who also provided him with much information for *Tafsīr*, is said to have died already in 243/857 as a man in his nineties.⁵⁸ Assuming that this date is correct, Ṭabarī's first stay in Baghdad lasted hardly more than a year, and he had gone south already in 242/856–7.

Scholars in al-Baṣrah whom Ṭabarī met during his visit there included men quoted again and again in his works. Among them were Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-A'lā al-Ṣan'ānī (d. 245/859[60]),⁵⁹ Muḥammad b. Mūsā al-Ḥarashī (d. 248/862),⁶⁰ and Abū al-Ash'ath Aḥmad b. al-Miqdām (d. 253/867).⁶¹ Others, such as Abū al-Jawzā' Aḥmad b. 'Uthmān (d. 246/860), are cited less frequently.⁶²

In al-Kūfah, he encountered, among others, Ismā'il b. Mūsā al-Fazārī (d. 245/859), whom Ṭabarī considered to be a grandson of al-Suddī,⁶³ and Sulaymān b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Ḥammād al-Ṭalḥī (d. 252/866), an expert in Qur'ān reading who showed himself willing to test Ṭabarī's knowledge and qualifications in the field.⁶⁴

The two men from whom he profited most in those years were Muḥammad b. Bashshār, known as Bundār (167–252/783[4]–866),⁶⁵ in al-Baṣrah, and Abū Kurayb Muḥammad b. al-'Alā' (d. in his

57. For Ḥumayd b. Mas'adah, see Ibn Hajar, *Tahdhīb*, III, 49. He is often quoted in *Tafsīr* as well as *Tahdhīb*, *Musnad 'Alī*, index, 429. For Bishr, see below, translation, n. 196.

58. See above, n. 53.

59. See below, translation, n. 101.

60. See Ibn Hajar, *Tahdhīb*, IX, 482, no. 778.

61. See below, translation, n. 970.

62. See Ibn Hajar, *Tahdhīb*, IV 206 f. He is mentioned in *Tahdhīb*, *Musnad Ibn 'Abbās*, index, 1051, and *History*, I, 1147.

63. For al-Fazārī, see Ibn Hajar, *Tahdhīb*, I, 335 f. His relationship to al-Suddī (below, translation, n. 276) was disputed.

64. For Sulaymān al-Ṭalḥī, see Ibn Hajar, *Tahdhīb*, IV, 206 f.; Ibn al-Jazārī, *Ghāyah*, II, 107, and I, 314, ll. 13 f. ('*araḍa 'alayh al-imām Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī*). Ibn al-Jazārī, like al-Maqrizī, *Muqaffā* (Ṭabarī, *Introductio* etc., XCVI), depends on al-Dānī. Ṣafadī, *Wāfi*, II, 285, l. 5, and Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, III, 121, also mention that Ṭabarī studied Qur'ān reading with him. It is not certain that he met him in al-Kūfah. Al-Ṭalḥī is mentioned in *Tafsīr*, XVI, 61, l. 3 (*ad* Qur. 19:31).

65. See below, translation, n. 44.

eighties in 247 or 248/861–2)⁶⁶ in al-Kūfah. As appears from the innumerable times that they are cited as transmitters, both Ibn Bashshār and Abū Kurayb exercised a great influence on him. Abū Kurayb was a difficult person, but Ṭabarī did not fail to mollify him from the start of their acquaintance by his extraordinary ability. When he came to his house together with other *ḥadīth* students clamoring for admission, he found the great scholar looking out of a window and asking for those who could recite from memory the traditions they had written down on his dictation. The assembled students looked at each other and then pointed to Ṭabarī as the one who would be able to do that. Abū Kurayb examined him and found him able to recite every tradition he was asked, with the exact day on which Abū Kurayb had taught it.⁶⁷

Ṭabarī probably spent less than two years traveling in southern Iraq and may have returned to Baghdad about 244/858–9. It was not until eight years later that he undertook his next major research trip that took him to Syria and Egypt. During that interval between journeys, we should possibly date his first attested gainful employment. He accepted a position as tutor to a son of the wazīr ʿUbaydallāh b. Yaḥyā b. Khāqān.⁶⁸ The boy was called Abū Yaḥyā. As the story suggests, he probably was the wazīr's son by a slave girl. Since Ibn Khāqān was out of office and in exile between 248 and 253, Ṭabarī would have held his tutorial position sometime between 244/858–9 and 248/962. The report we have is introduced by the words "when Ṭabarī entered Baghdad" and could refer to his first arrival in the capital. However, a rather high salary is involved, which seems more than could have been commanded by a very young and unknown student such as Ṭabarī was when he first came to Baghdad. Moreover, the story shows Ṭabarī already firmly committed to legal ethics, which is hardly in keeping with someone seventeen years of age. Ṭabarī, we are told, had merchandise to provide for his living expenses (sent, no doubt, by his father). It was stolen, and he was in dire straits,

66. See below, translation, n. 77.

67. See *Irshād*, VI, 431, ed. Rifāʿī, XVIII, 51. "Difficult person" renders *sharis al-khuluq*. This characterization, which fitted other scholars as well, is also used for the grammarian Thaʿlab (*Irshād*, VI, 438, l. 7, ed. Rifāʿī, XVIII, 60).

68. See *El*², III, 824a, s. v. Ibn Khāqān (2). The future wazīr was a student of Ibn Ḥanbal; see Ibn Abī Yaʿlā, *Ṭabaqāt*, I, 204. On another son, the wazīr al-Khāqāni, see below, n. 129.