

Perspective and Method in Early Islamic
Historiography:

A study of al-Ṭabarī's
Ta'rīkh al-Rusul wa 'l-Mulūk

by

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ABSTRACT

The Ta'rīkh al-Rusul wa 'l-Mulūk of Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (ca. 228-310 A.H.) has, since its recovery in the last century, been considered the most important primary source for the study of the first three centuries of Islam. However, due to the author's technique of reporting his information, scholars have generally regarded al-Ṭabarī as a compiler and chronicler, using the Ta'rīkh only to verify factual information, complaining of its disorganization and tediousness, and dismissing any notion that the author could have expressed opinions or attitudes of his own.

It is the contention of this thesis that al-Ṭabarī did indicate his attitudes towards past events and that his contemporary readers could easily have perceived his opinions and his perspective of early Islamic history. By analyzing five sections from the Ta'rīkh, each representing one of the major time spans included in the work, and by paying particular attention to al-Ṭabarī's use of isnāds (chains of narrators) and his organization and juxtaposition of akhbār (narrations), we will attempt to determine his attitudes towards these events and his sources, and his thoughts on the development of the Islamic umma from its conception to his own time. A comparison of al-Ṭabarī's treatment of these incidents with the accounts of three other contemporary historians will help to expose the differences between them and allow us to understand why the Ta'rīkh remains the outstanding primary source for the first three centuries of Islam.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I am indebted to Dr Marilyn R. Waldman, of The Ohio State University, who first interested me in Islamic historiography and encouraged me to continue work as a postgraduate in this field.

To the many friends and fellow students who took time to discuss problems with me, and who listened to my all too frequent grumbles and wails of complaint, I can only extend general thanks and hope they know what a constant source of strength they provided me. I would especially like to thank Dr M. V. McDonald, Dr I.K.A. Howard, Frances McGeever, Pita Heseltine, Joseph Givony and Christine Woodhead, who so cheerfully typed the final copy of this thesis.

My greatest debt I owe to my parents, and a mere "thank you" seems a woefully inadequate payment. I can only dedicate this thesis to them both, and hope that the one remaining will accept it with much love and gratitude from her "different" daughter.

ABBREVIATIONS

- Din al-Dīnawarī, al-Akḥbār al-Tiwāl
- EI, EI² Encyclopedia of Islam, first and second ed.
- GAL Carl Brockelmann, Geschichte der Arabischen Literatur, second ed.
- (GAL) S -----, Geschichte der Arabischen Literatur, Supplement
- IHjr Ibn Ḥajar, Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb
- IN Ibn al-Nadīm, Kitāb al-Fihrist
- IS Ibn Sa'd, Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kabīr
- Khalidi Tarif Khalidi, Islamic Historiography: The Histories of Mas'ūdī
- Khtb al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, Ta'rīkh Baghdād
- Mas al-Mas'ūdī, Murūj al-Dhahab (Les Prairies d'Or)
- Petersen E. Ladewig Petersen, 'Alī and Mu'āwiya in Early Arabic Tradition
- Sezgin Fuat Sezgin, Geschichte des Arabischen Schrifttums
- TT al-Ṭabarī, Ta'rīkh al-Rusūl wa 'l-Mulūk (Annales)

Yqbi al-Ya'qūbī, Ta'rīkh al-Ya'qūbī

Yqt Yāqūt, Irshād al-Arīb ilā Ma'rifat al-Adīb or
Dictionary of Learned Men of Yāqūt

TRANSLITERATION

All Arabic words and names in this thesis are transliterated according to the system of EI² with the following exceptions: dj = j; ḳ = q; the definite article is always written al- except before the conjunction wa, in which case it becomes wa'l-.

Place names are given their standard English spelling, and are not transliterated unless they stand for the name of an incident or battle; eg., Baghdad, but Dhū Qār.

DATING

Unless otherwise qualified, all dates in the body of this thesis are given according to the hijrī calendar. As a quick reference for the reader, a table of corresponding dates of the Christian and Muslim calendars is given below; the Christian year listed is that in which the hijrī year began.

A.H.	A.D.	A.H.	A.D.
1	622	180	796
10	631	190	805
20	640	200	815
30	650	210	825
40	660	220	835
50	670	230	844
60	679	240	854
70	689	250	864
80	699	260	873
90	708	270	883
100	718	280	893
110	728	290	902
120	737	300	912
130	747	310	922
140	757	320	932
150	767	330	941
160	776	340	951
170	786	350	961

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Badr

Ṣiffīn

The caliphate of 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz

The first siege of Baghdad

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The first siege of Baghdad

Aḥmad b. Abī Ya'qūb al-Ya'qūbī and the

Ta'rīkh al-Ya'qūbī

Dhū Qār

Badr

Ṣiffīn

The caliphate of 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz

The first siege of Baghdad

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PREFACE

Every man who studies history forms an impression of past events, based partly on his own experiences and upbringing, and partly on the attitudes of the society in which he lives, which may broadly be called his historical perspective; his attitudes may be conscious or unconscious, stated or unstated, but they nevertheless exist. So, too, does the man who writes history have certain attitudes, which both consciously and unconsciously mould his interpretation of events, to such an extent that his readers may often discern certain biases or views which are characteristic of his writing.

The Ta'riḫ al-Rusul wa 'l-Mulūk of Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī has long been accepted by scholars as one of the outstanding sources for information concerning the early history of Islam; and, since the appearance of the first complete edition less than one hundred years ago, students of Islam have used it as a mine of facts with which they corroborate their ideas and theories.¹ The importance of the Ta'riḫ

1) The first published edition of the Ta'riḫ was J. G. L. Kosegarten, Tabaristanensis; id est, Abu Dschaferi Mohammed Ben Dscherir Ettaberi annales regum et legatorum Dei 3 vols. (Gryphisvaldiae, 1831-53), which included only a portion of the Prophet's life. The first complete edition, still used today as the standard edition and the one used in this thesis was TT. Two other editions have been published: Ta'riḫ al-Umam wa 'l-Mulūk 8 vols. (ed. Maḥmūd Hilmī, Cairo, 1358 A.H.) and/

to the determination of the actual events in early Islam cannot be overstressed; however, despite this importance attached to both the author and his work, neither a full-scale internal study of the Ta'rīkh, nor a study of the Ta'rīkh and its author in relation to the general field of Islamic historiography has ever been produced.¹

cont'd: and Ta'rīkh al-Ṭabarī 10 vols. (ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, Cairo, 1960-). In addition to the Arabic text, translations of two sections are available in European languages: Theodor Nöldeke trans., Geschichte der Perser und Araber zur Zeit der Sasaniden (Leiden, 1879); Elma Marin trans., Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī's The Reign of of-Mu'tasim (833-842) (New Haven, 1951). The French translations of L. Dubeux, Chronique d'Abou-Djafar Mohammed Ṭabarī (Paris, 1836), and H. Zotenberg, Chronique de Abou-Djafar-Mohammed-ben-Djarir-ben-Yezid Ṭabarī 4 vols., (Paris, 1967-74), are based on the abridgement and translation into Persian of Bal'amī and are not very representative of the Arabic original

- 1) The secondary literature on al-Ṭabarī and the Ta'rīkh amounts to no more than a paragraph or two in works on Islamic literature or articles on Muslim historiography. In addition to the references given in the next paragraph, see R. A. Nicholson, A Literary History of the Arabs (Cambridge, 1969), 350-52; Franz Rosenthal, A History of Muslim Historiography (Leiden, 1952), 64, 116-17; G. Richter, "Medieval Arabic Historiography", Islamic Culture XXXIV (1960), 144; Joseph de Somogyi, "The Development of Arabic Historiography", Journal of Semitic Studies III (1958), 376.

section on the death of the Caliph 'Uthmān and by showing how each account represented the views of certain segments of Muslim society. Furthermore, Hodgson believed that al-Ṭabarī was attempting to convey a certain vision of Islamic society, in order to provide an alternative to military revolt for those conservative orthodox members of the umma who were concerned with establishing standards for living within the society which could not be gainsaid by morally inadequate rulers.¹

This thesis, then, is concerned with examining Hodgson's theories, more specifically with determining al-Ṭabarī's attitudes towards, and perspective of, Islamic history and his place in Islamic historiography. We are not concerned here with verifying the factual information in the Ta'rīkh, as what al-Ṭabarī thought might or should have happened is just as significant to this study as any event which did actually take place. In order to provide a theoretical framework for this study, we will discuss in the introduction the attitudes of modern scholars towards historiography in general, and certain general characteristics of Islamic historiography in particular which will then be applied to the Ta'rīkh in order to test their validity as generalizations.

Because of the length of the Ta'rīkh, five events have

1) Hodgson's views on al-Ṭabarī can be found in "Two Pre-Modern Muslim Historians: Pitfalls and Opportunities in Presenting Them to Moderns", in Towards World Community (ed. John Ulric Nef, The Hague, 1968), and The Venture of Islam I (Chicago, 1974), 352-57.

been chosen from it to illustrate the theories and statements in this thesis. Each incident represents one of the five major time spans in the Ta'rīkh: the battle of Dhū Qār for the pre-Islamic period; the battle of Badr during the Prophet's lifetime; the confrontation of 'Alī and Mu'āwīya at Ṣiffīn from the period of the Rāshidūn; the caliphate of 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz for the Umayyad dynasty; the siege of Baghdad by al-Ma'mūn's generals for the early 'Abbāsīd period. While these sections may seem somewhat arbitrarily chosen, they are all incidents which represent crucial moments for the Islamic (or Arab, as in the case of Dhū Qār) community and the results of which were to determine the future development of that umma.

That al-Ṭabarī's attitudes towards these events might be discerned, special attention will be paid to his sources and to his organization of his material. A study of the main transmitters used in the Ta'rīkh will reveal the accepted opinion regarding their reputations, which al-Ṭabarī's contemporary readers would have known and which would have coloured the interpretation of the material transmitted by them. Furthermore, by studying the organization and juxtaposition of akhbār in these sections, it seems possible to establish, however provisionally, al-Ṭabarī's attitudes not only to the events and participants therein, but also towards his sources.

From these premises it will be sought to determine the central theme of the Ta'rīkh, al-Ṭabarī's purpose in writing it, his historical perspective, and whether or not he had a discernible philosophy of history. His treatment of these five events and his view of Islamic history in general will be compared with that of three other contemporary historians to

judge in what respects he differed from and agreed with authors representing other religio-political segments of society. Finally, we will try to determine al-Ṭabarī's importance as an historian by looking at the Ta'rīkh within the context of his other writings and of the social and intellectual milieu of the time, and by considering the influence of the Ta'rīkh on later Muslim historians.

This thesis is necessarily based on certain assumptions which should be mentioned. First, because there exists no complete manuscript of the Ta'rīkh, there must always be some small suspicion that the partial manuscripts available to us do not represent the entire work; however, for the purposes of this thesis, we have assumed that the Ta'rīkh as we have it today is more or less identical to the work which al-Ṭabarī wrote. Furthermore, it should be noted that much of the information in the Ta'rīkh is not available to us in independent versions; however, as that material which can be checked with an original source nearly always tends to be verbatim quotations, there seems to be no reason not to assume that al-Ṭabarī was faithful and accurate in using the exact wording of the oral transmitter or written work.

INTRODUCTION

The problems found in various aspects of the study of history have been a matter of much speculation in recent years, and the questions arising from attempts to discern a particular historian's perspective on history and his method in recording events figure prominently in the discussion. Many scholars, both those trained as historians and those working in other fields, have felt the need to explain the nature, philosophy and craft of history, partly as a reaction against the positivist conceptions which had dominated historical thought for more than two centuries and are still met with in historical writing today. A wide range of problems has been posed and theories advanced in the speculation of the last few decades, amongst which we will confine ourselves to those which treat of historical perspective and method, those aspects with which this thesis is immediately concerned.

Men are products of their own time; their attitudes are formed, at least partly, by the prevailing opinions of the society in which they live. The historian is no different; he is, in the words of E. H. Carr, the "conscious or unconscious spokesman of the society to which he belongs".¹ The historian brings these attitudes to the work he undertakes, or, rather, his work reflects the mental climate of the man and the time. Marc Bloch emphasizes this point, stating that the writer's first duty is to understand the milieu

1) E. H. Carr, What is History? (London, 1961), 29.

of the man, who is "faced by problems of conscience rather different from our own".¹ History means something different to each generation; the experiences of one generation will almost inevitably colour its interpretation of the past. By evaluating those experiences, we learn much about the man who lived through them, and may be able to understand more clearly why he would wish to write a history, perceive his motives in doing so, and judge of how he treats his material.

The study of the historical work itself raises questions about the materials used in it. Here we need not deal with the nature of evidence and sources; our concern is with the way in which the historian uses this information, and how he chooses what evidence he will use.

Every scholar who deals with the philosophy or method of history would probably agree that his subject is based upon facts; but what are these facts which form the body of historical knowledge? Carr makes a distinction between an historical fact and a fact about the past: he considers the former to be one which is used by an historian in a thesis or interpretation which comes to be generally accepted by other historians as being significant and valid. Thus for a fact to be historical depends largely on the interpretation which the historian gives it.² In contrast, G. R. Elton makes no such distinction; to him, an historical fact is simply an event which has occurred and is known, and interpretation or general

1) Marc Bloch, The Historian's Craft (trans. Peter Putnam, Manchester, 1954), 41.

2) Carr, op. cit., 6-10.

acceptance "has nothing whatsoever to do with its independent existence".¹ Whether or not one agrees with either Carr or Elton, one thing is made clear by both men: an historical fact must be known to succeeding generations. An historian may theorize about the occurrence of an event, but without some sort of evidence upon which he can base his theory, it cannot be called an historical fact.

Whatever an historian means by a fact of history, there comes a point in his research in which he must look through his evidence and determine which of those facts are relevant and useful to his work. If he is truly attempting to arrive at a satisfactory interpretation, he uses the facts which may offer negative as well as positive proof of his hypothesis; he will not suppress certain evidence simply because it upsets his own theories on the subject. Furthermore, the historian may have collected such a large amount of evidence that he may find it necessary to use only a proportion of it. He therefore "selects" certain facts to use in his arguments; but this selection should mean that he uses the facts which he deems to be most representative of the total. Interpretation plays a large part in the selection of evidence; what may seem to be an important fact to one historian may be totally irrelevant to another who views the subject in a different light.

After collecting his facts, the historian attempts to interpret them and to find some sort of relationship between

1) G. R. Elton, The Practice of History (London, 1967), 56.

them; causal explanation is the most common form of doing this. Of course there are many other forms of historical explanation that are non-causal, but the causal explanation is by far the most widely used. It involves explaining the occurrence of an event by referring to those events preceding it as its causes. Some historians search for precipitant causes, some for motivational causes, some for abnormal causes, those which intrude upon a system or equilibrium which is relatively constant; but all these are facets of causal explanation.¹

The writing of history brings us to a special problem. The nature of the early Islamic historical work, such as the one with which we are dealing, brings it into a category which Collingwood calls scissors-and-paste history - "History constructed by excerpting and combining the testimonies of different authorities". Collingwood refuses to think of this as history, thus eliminating the vast majority of late Roman and early European works from the realm of this art.² But whether or not we think of these works as history, people of those times did; and therefore we must consider them as evidence of the historical consciousness of their own times.

Since history in the Islamic world was written in this

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- 1) On causation in history, see Carr, op. cit., 81-102; David Hackett Fischer, Historians' Fallacies (paperback ed., New York, 1970), 164-186; Morton White, Foundations of Historical Knowledge (New York, 1965), 105-218.
 - 2) R. G. Collingwood, The Idea of History (Oxford, 1946), 257-61.

fashion, the writer basing his information on the testimony of an authority, it is rather more difficult to study the actual products. Each report may differ in various aspects, such as style and vocabulary, because they were composed at different times and in different places. Furthermore, attempting to study the work of a single historian may be further complicated by the fact that his work has not survived in an independent form, but is known only piecemeal through the works of later authors who cite him as an authority.¹

When attempting to define a certain historian's perspective of history, one must consider the topic of objectivity in history. E. H. Carr has written: "Absolute and timeless objectivity is an unreal abstraction".² This is the sort of statement which Elton terms "pernicious nonsense", because it favours relativism.³ Elton seems to be ignoring the fact that history is a subject in which men study men; that each man is imbued with the attitudes and opinions of a certain age; and that no matter how hard one tries, man cannot totally forget the things which he has been taught from childhood. Of course, there is a difference between the subjective

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- 1) For example, Ursula Sezgin, Abū Miḥnaf (Leiden, 1971), attempts to reconstruct the works of that author by studying the various passages in other works and by comparing them with works on the same subjects which have survived independently.
 - 2) E. H. Carr, "The view from the arena", Times Literary Supplement (7 March 1975), 246. See also, Carr, What is History?, 114-19.
 - 3) Elton, op. cit., 57.

statements which may be made while attempting to be objective and the deliberate moral judgments, a practice against which many scholars have objected.¹ Furthermore, objectiveness and its reverse, subjectiveness, may largely depend upon the purpose for which the historian is writing.

Finally, an historian's perspective of history may lead him to formulate, or further define an already existing, general scheme of history, in which he sets out patterns or laws which history follows. One of the first scholars who attempted to find patterns in history was the fourteenth century A. D. Muslim historian Ibn Khaldūn, who still retains a certain appeal today not only for historians and philosophers but for social scientists who also seek patterns in their disciplines which will put them on a par with the natural sciences. Ibn Khaldūn is an early and rather isolated case of this tendency; but during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries A.D. European scholars began to speculate on the nature of history, shedding the bonds of a belief in divine providence and turning to natural science and philosophy as models to direct the course of historical studies. This type of speculation has continued into the twentieth century, with Spengler's conception of Culture and Civilization based on the analogy of the human body and Toynbee's patterns of challenge and response, withdrawal and return of civilizations.

1) On the problem of moral judgments in history, see White, op. cit., 271-91; Herbert Butterfield, The Whig Interpretation of History (paperback ed., Harmondsworth, England, 1973), 79-95.

Collingwood calls this seeking of patterns "pigeon-holing", and states that their value in discovering historical truth which could not be ascertained by the interpretation of evidence "was exactly nil".¹ The basic problem with these universal schemes is that they reduce the contradictions and variety of human affairs with which history is concerned.

* * * * *

The Islamic historian had to be responsive to the circle which he addressed, flattering their prejudices and confirming their opinions of themselves, views which were often indistinguishable from his own. In this respect, much early Islamic historical writing can be seen as an attempt by the authors to confirm the contemporary circumstances of Islamic society by providing a consistent development of that society from a given point of departure, or by describing the constituent elements of the past in a way which would demonstrate the aberration of the present and the need for its reform. Thus the historian will tend either to give an implicit sanction to the society in which he lives by showing events of the past as leading inevitably to this state of affairs, or to order the historical events so as to demonstrate how the present has departed from what should have been the consequences of the past. The historian is a man not only of his own time, but also a member of a particular cultural milieu, and until we have formed a conception, however provisional, about the latter we cannot intelligently grasp the factors

1) Collingwood, op. cit., 263-66.

which went into the composition of his work and gave it its general tone.

What cannot be denied is that each historical work, whether it be a narrative of past events or a chronicle of current affairs, leaves the reader with a distinct and individual impression which is quite separate from the language employed or even the nature of the incidents recorded. It is this which properly goes toward the development of what we call historical perspective.

Determining the period which the historian considers to be the exemplar for his society will help to distinguish his historical perspective. For the Islamic historian, the "Golden Age" lies in the past, generally in the first few decades of Islam. Depending upon his religio-political persuasion, his economic situation, and his intellectual outlook, he may choose as his model the umma of Muhammad at Medina, the caliphate of 'Alī, or some other period during these early years. Because the Islamic historian looks to this period in the past as the high point of his society, he will never be satisfied with the society in which he lives unless he believes that it has correctly followed the laws and ideals formulated in the earlier period. As a corollary to this, his view of the world is almost totally dominated by Islam; his ideal society is Islamic. He does not criticize the basic tenets of Islam, and matters which he considers harmful or derogatory to it are suppressed. Biblical history especially is generally founded on the Qur'ān and highly Islamicized.

Perhaps the most obvious characteristic of Islamic historical writing is the historian's deference to his authorities. The nature of these historical writings and the dependence of the earliest authors upon oral, rather than written, records forced the historian to repeat his sources verbatim or at most to combine several nearly identical sources. While this method enables modern scholars to isolate various historical traditions and even to recover lost historical works to a certain extent, it allowed the Islamic historian almost no latitude for making known his own opinions, even if he were so inclined. The most blatant method of indicating personal views was omitting information, as is done in historical writings which are heavily weighted in favour of one group, such as the 'Alids or 'Abbāsids. Other methods are generally more subtle and may entail an intricate knowledge of the authorities cited and the sources used by the historian.

The basic form of Islamic historical writing is a series of short narrations which are generally complete within themselves, with no necessary connection with each other. Each event was thought of as discrete and could, therefore, stand on its own. This concept of the historical event gives the historical writing an anecdotal quality which later historians would utilize to a much greater degree in works whose main purpose was entertainment, a function generally fulfilled at an earlier period by storytellers and writers of adab. These later historical writings take over the role of literature to a great extent, not only its entertaining qualities but also as a vehicle for elegant prose style.

The Islamic historian was rarely interested in daily life or in the life of the lower socio-economic classes. While he generally writes in terms of the whole of the Islamic umma, the consequences which determine for him the importance of the historical event would probably not have touched the vast majority of Muslim society, especially those people outside the area in which the event took place. Although the historian is nearly totally indifferent to the trivia of the life around him, at the same time he is often fascinated by extraordinary or fabulous tales of things which were not within his own experience and which generally have to do with the pre-Islamic period or with areas lying outside Islamic control. These type of tales are most often, but not exclusively, found in works by historians with a special interest in geography, such as al-Mas'ūdī.

Communications within the society in which the Islamic historian lived were such that his experience of the world at large was very limited, as was his acquaintance with patterns of thought and behaviour outside those of his own community. The familiar picture of the Islamic scholar as an inquiring student travelling from metropolis to metropolis in order to study under some master of reputation in a certain field should not be seen as a contradiction of this previous statement; within every city of size in the Islamic world there existed quarters for the inhabitants who had come from various regions, and it was among his own people in their own quarter that the visitor, whether scholar or merchant, would normally reside. It must be recognized that the individual living or travelling outside his own community

was dangerously vulnerable even in the most settled of times, and this insecurity tended to force him into reliance on a restricted circle of family and friends. Thus with no diversity of experience to draw upon, the Islamic historian was often credulous to the point of gullibility; having no resources with which to compare the events of which he had received reports, he was prepared to accept all things as possible, and in some cases actually seems to prefer the incredible to the prosaic.

* * * * *

In the West, the study of Islamic historical works was for a long time hampered by the unavailability of manuscripts or printed editions of these sources. However, in recent times, especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a large number of manuscripts, which either supplemented known works or brought to light works regarded as lost, have been printed; and at the present time, a great quantity of early Islamic historical writings is available for study.

While the discovery and editing of new manuscript materials is a necessary and continuing duty of scholarship, many modern scholars of Islam have seen the need for a critical evaluation of their sources. Basing their assessments largely on the confrontation of works which cover the same events, it has been possible to arrive at some tentative conclusions regarding the attitudes of early Islamic writers and the accuracy of their reporting. Leone Caetani, by collating and translating the majority of early Islamic sources, provided a basis for the comparative study and criticism which is still

largely followed today. The work of Julius Wellhausen on the Rāshidūn and Umayyad caliphs was partly an attempt to determine the trends and motives of early Islamic historians, but is unfortunately marred by his anti-'Abbāsīd bias and his emphasis on the Western concept of the nation-state.

Despite the obvious dependency of modern scholarship on these sources, few attempts have been made to study in depth the methods and attitudes of individual Islamic historians, with the exception of Ibn Khaldūn who, however, wrote in the post-classical period and lived outside the Islamic heartlands. D. S. Margoliouth felt that biography was a sufficient introduction to a historian, and this is an attitude that persists to the present day, with many scholars simply raiding historical texts for a few "facts". Franz Rosenthal, in the attempt to present a unified study of Muslim historiography, is totally uncritical of early Islamic writers and accepts at face value their own - often platitudinous - statements on the purpose of their work. The one recent study of an Islamic historical writer, Abū Mikhnaf, is unfortunately hampered by the fact that none of his writings have survived intact, and can only be dealt with piecemeal through their citation or quotation in the works of later writers.

CHAPTER 1

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF AL-ṬABARĪ

Religio-Political Background¹

On the death of Hārūn al-Rashīd in 193, the caliphate was contested by his two sons al-Amīn and al-Ma'mūn. Hārūn himself had attempted to forestall this very event during his own lifetime, by designating his three sons al-Amīn, al-Ma'mūn and al-Mu'taṣim as heirs to the caliphate in that order; furthermore, he appointed al-Amīn governor of Syria and gave al-Ma'mūn control of the eastern provinces, specifying that al-Amīn would lose his claim to the caliphate if he attempted to encroach upon al-Ma'mūn's rights. In the year after Hārūn's death, al-Amīn tried to have his own son named as his successor; and when al-Ma'mūn broke off communications with the caliphate, al-Amīn declared him removed from his governorship and the succession. Two of al-Amīn's armies

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- 1) General surveys which contain material useful for this section include: Carl Brockelmann, History of the Islamic Peoples (trans. Joel Carmichael and Moshe Perlmann, London, 1949); H. A. R. Gibb, Mohammedanism (second ed., London, 1961); Marshall G. S. Hodgson, The Venture of Islam I (Chicago, 1974); Bernard Lewis, The Arabs in History (London, 1966); J. J. Saunders, A History of Medieval Islam (London, 1972); W. Montgomery Watt, Islamic Political Thought (Edinburgh, 1968), and The Majesty That Was Islam (London, 1974). The relevant articles in EI and EI² give additional details.

were in turn defeated by Ṭāhir b. al-Ḥusayn, al-Ma'mūn's general; the third army mutinied before reaching Persia. His Syrian supporters rioted and for a short time he was held captive by one of his own generals. He was later released, but Baghdad fell to al-Ma'mūn's generals in 198 and al-Amīn himself was killed by Ṭāhir's men.

On his assumption of the caliphate, al-Ma'mūn was faced with trying to govern a large empire in only one part of which his own base of power rested. Parts of the empire had already slipped from the direct control of the caliphate: Spain had been under the control of the Umayyads since 139, and the Maghrib had been ruled by local dynasties since before 184. Al-Ma'mūn sought to preserve the empire by attempting to reconcile as many factions as possible to his rule. Shortly after assuming the caliphate he sought to placate the 'Alids by betrothing the head of the 'Alid family, 'Alī al-Riḍā, to his daughter and naming him successor to the caliphate; but Iraq refused to accept 'Alī and declared Ibrāhīm b. Mahdī caliph. Al-Ma'mūn, who had not left Merv since assuming the caliphate, began to march to Baghdad; but at Tus 'Alī al-Riḍā became ill and died, probably from poison. Al-Ma'mūn continued on to Baghdad, which finally fell to him two years later; the death of 'Alī al-Riḍā, especially under such suspicious circumstances, ended al-Ma'mūn's immediate hopes for reconciling the 'Alid faction, but did not alter his search for a compromise.

With the autonomy of Ṭāhir having to be recognized in Khurasan and with the growing power of Bābak in Azerbaijan, al-Ma'mūn again sought to compromise the various factions.

In 212 he declared the Mu'tazilite doctrine of the createdness of the Qur'ān official dogma and just before his death in 218 instituted the mihna to deal with those people who contested his decision. By subscribing to this theory, al-Ma'mūn gave some support to both the secretarial class and the 'ālims, the two most important opposing groups, without giving his total backing to either. The death of al-Ma'mūn shortly after the proclamation of this edict undoubtedly weakened any lasting effects which his compromise might have had; the mihna and the support for the doctrine of the Mu'tazilites was finally reversed about 235 by the Caliph al-Mutawakkil, who attempted to reassert his control by reverting to the traditional orthodoxy in the hope of rallying the support of the conservative elements of the community to his side.

With the failure of al-Ma'mūn's policy, a new political force asserted itself. The Turks, who constituted the caliph's personal bodyguard, consolidated their power during the reigns of al-Mu'taṣim (218-27) and his son al-Wāthiq (227-32), to the extent that during the next several years they chose and removed caliphs as they wished. Al-Mutawakkil's (232-47) reversal of al-Ma'mūn's policies is to be seen as an effort to counter the arrogant power of these Turkish soldiers by appealing to the conservative forces in society, but he failed and was assassinated by his son and the Turkish commanders. The power of these Turkish soldiers weakened the central government so much that it no longer asserted any effective power outside the environs of Baghdad and Samarra, the new capital built in 221 by al-Mu'taṣim. The success of the Zanj

rebellion in southern Iraq (255-70) clearly shows the failure of the caliphate to find a wide base of power which would allow for the inclusion of the divergent social, political and religious factions active at that time. The rise of local dynasties during the last half of the third century A.H., the Ṣaffārids and Samānids in the east, the Ṭulūnids in Egypt, the Qarmaṭians in eastern and southern Arabia, completed the disintegration of an empire which had been at its height less than a century before.

Social and Intellectual Development¹

The rise to power of the secretarial class immediately after the 'Abbāsīd Revolution brought about changes not only within the religio-political sphere, but also in the intellectual and social life of the Islamic community.² Many of

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- 1) The best detailed study for this section is found in Ignaz Goldziher, Muslim Studies I (ed. S. M. Stern, trans. C. R. Barber and S. M. Stern, Chicago, 1966), 137-98. Surveys may be found in R. A. Nicholson, A Literary History of the Arabs (Cambridge, 1962); Hodgson, The Venture of Islam, op. cit. I. W. Montgomery Watt, The Formative Period of Islamic Thought (Edinburgh, 1973), gives information on theological, legal and philosophical developments.
 - 2) The religio-political implications of the Shu'ūbiyya movement are discussed in H. A. R. Gibb, "The Social Significance of the Shuubiyya", in Studies on the Civilization of Islam (ed. Stanford H. Shaw and William R. Polk, Boston, 1962), which also provides useful corrections to Goldziher.

these kātibs were Persian or Persianized Iraqis drawn from outside the Arab aristocracy, from the mercantile and middle classes and especially from the mawālī. These kātibs possessed a literary taste different from that of their predecessors, largely founded on the old Iranian-based adab tradition. Their defence of these literary conventions led to their objecting to the excessive role of pre-Islamic Arabia in existing literature and to their producing works which not only denigrated the Arabs but which often insisted that the Arabs were inferior to the other segments of Islamic society. This movement, known as the Shu'ūbiyya, lasted for nearly a century and involved nearly all the major intellectual figures during that time. It finally came to an end in al-Ṭabarī's lifetime, mainly through the efforts of Ibn Qutayba (213-76) who, while accepting the Iranian traditions of court etiquette and administration which the kātibs followed, evolved a style of writing admired for its simplicity and clarity, which was to become the model for much in later Arabic prose writing.

Although the Shu'ūbites were mainly concerned with literature, other fields were developing at the same time. Under al-Ma'mūn (198-218) medicine, astronomy, and other natural sciences, especially those for which Greek sources were available, were introduced and studied at what may be regarded as an academic level in institutions founded by the caliph in Baghdad and elsewhere. The science of philology, already well established before 'Abbāsīd times, produced scholars who extended investigations into new regions: Khalīl b. Aḥmad (d. ca. 170) founded the system of 'arūd, while

Abū 'Ubayda (d. 210) and al-Mufaḍḍal al-Dabbī (d. ca. 168) produced collections of folklore and poetry from pre-Islamic Arabia.

The introduction of the manufacture of paper in Baghdad (ca. 184) and the growth of a large middle class interested in literature and general knowledge also helped the growth of intellectual studies. Paper provided a cheap and more readily available alternative to papyrus, allowing many more people to own copies of works for themselves. This led to a much greater circulation of written works, which before had been more or less restricted to the educated elite and the caliphal court.

Al-Ṭabarī himself lived at a time of intense intellectual activity, though the period is significant more for the efforts towards collecting and codifying information in the recognized sciences than for its productions in literature proper. All six of what came to be regarded as the orthodox authorities on ḥadīth were collected, and much of the systematizing of the various schools of fiqh was carried out in his lifetime. Al-Ṭabarī himself, along with such contemporaries as al-Balādhurī (d. 279), al-Dīnawarī (d. 292), al-Ya'qūbī (d. 284), and al-Mas'ūdī (d. 345), collected much of the information which we have today on the early history of Islam.

Al-Ṭabarī and his Works¹

Muḥammad b. Jarīr b. Yazīd b. Kathīr b. Ghālib, Abū Ja'far al-Ṭabarī,² commonly known as Muḥammad b. Jarīr or al-Ṭabarī, was born about the end of 224 or the beginning of 225 in Amul, the chief city of the province of Tabaristan. He was probably educated locally, and is said to have memorized the Qur'ān by the age of seven, to have led the prayers at the age of eight, and to have taken down hadīths when he was nine.

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- 1) The main source of biographical information on al-Ṭabarī is Yqt VI, 423-62, from whom later biographers took most of their information. Very little is actually known about al-Ṭabarī's life: most of the biographies are filled with charming tales which illustrate al-Ṭabarī's great knowledge (e.g. Yqt VI, 432), his refusal to accept gifts and official positions (e.g. Yqt VI, 458), and some of his human qualities (e.g. Yqt VI, 434). In addition to Yqt, see the major Arabic biographers; IN, 234-35; D. S. Margoliouth, Lectures on Arabic Historians (New York, 1972), 101-2; TT, Introductio.
 - 2) There is some disagreement among the biographers about al-Ṭabarī's name. Yqt VI, 423, gives this form; Ibn Khallikān, Wafayāt al-'Ayān (Cairo, 1948), 332, also gives this form, but prefers Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr b. Yazīd b. Khālid al-Ṭabarī. IN, 234, gives the b. Khālid form and also adds the nisba al-Āmulī.

To complete his early education, he travelled to various cities in the Islamic world renowned as centres of learning: Rayy, Baghdad (where he had hoped to study with Ahmad b. Ḥanbal who, however, died [241] shortly before al-Ṭabarī's arrival), Basra and Kufa. He returned to Baghdad, where he served as tutor to the son of 'Ubayd Allāh b. Yahyā, the wazīr of the Caliph al-Mutawakkil, a post which he held until 248. He then resumed his studies, travelling to Egypt, Syria and Medina, returned to Tabaristan for a short visit, and then settled in Baghdad, where he lived and worked for the rest of his life.¹ He died there in Shawwāl 310 and was buried in his house. Yāqūt gives two reports, one of which says that al-Ṭabarī was buried at night from fear of the common people of the city, who thought he was a Shī'ite. The other report, however, insists that no one believed him to have Shī'i sympathies, and that only God could count the number of people who gathered around his bier and who

1) The chronology of al-Ṭabarī's travels is highly confused. It seems fairly certain that he was in Egypt in 253, 256 and 263 (Yqt VI, 432-34), and in Baghdad during 258 (TT III, 1762). He seems to have been in Syria between his first two visits to Egypt, and in Medina both before and after 253 (Yqt VI, 432, 435). He apparently visited Tabaristan after his second trip to Medina. After settling in Baghdad, he left only once on a visit to Tabaristan in 290 (Yqt VI, 435).

prayed over his grave, night and day, for many months.¹

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The biographies give the names of certain teachers of al-Ṭabarī and of those whose lectures he is said to have attended, some of whom seem to be remembered merely because of their famous pupil. Those for whom biographies can be found appear, in the main, to have been of the orthodox establishment and, in the often contradictory information given of them, are regarded as trustworthy authorities to varying degrees. Listed below are brief notices of some of the better known:

Muhammad b. Humayd b. Hayyān, Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Rāzī taught hadīth in Rayy, from whom al-Ṭabarī is said to have learned over 100,000 hadīths. He is also reputed to have taught Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal. Considered trustworthy by some, many other authorities complain about his inaccuracies, especially his practice of attributing hadīths to someone other than the actual narrator; nonetheless he is quoted by Abū Dā'ūd, Ibn Māja, al-Tirmidhī and Ibn Abī al-Dunyā. Al-Ṭabarī frequently quotes him in both the Tafsīr and the Ta'rīkh, most often as the transmitter of Ibn Ishāq. He died in 248.²

1) Yqt VI, 423. On al-Ṭabarī's alleged Shi'ī sympathies, see al-Ḥibr Yūsuf Nūr al-Dā'im, The Charge of Shi'ism Against al-Ṭabarī with Special Reference to his Tafsīr (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1969).

2) Yqt VI, 430; IN, 234; IHjr IX, 127-31; Khtb II, 259-64.

Muhammad b. Bashshār Bundār was a scholar in Basra. He is considered a reliable authority, and was famed for quoting all his hadīths from memory. He died in 252.¹

Bishr b. Mu'ādh al-'Uqdī also taught in Basra. He is considered trustworthy in hadīth, and was quoted by al-Nasā'ī, al-Tirmidhī, Ibn Māja and Ibn Abī al-Dunyā as well as being one of the main transmitters used by al-Ṭabarī in the Tafsīr. He died about 245.²

Hannād b. al-Sarī al-Dārimī was an ascetic who taught hadīth in Kufa, where he died in 243. He is considered trustworthy and was quoted by al-Bukhārī and Ibn Abī al-Dunyā.³

Ismā'il b. Mūsā al-Fazārī al-Suddī was a scholar who taught hadīth in Kufa. Despite his Shī'ite tendencies, he is considered reliable in hadīth and was quoted by al-Bukhārī, Abū Dā'ūd, al-Tirmidhī and Ibn Māja. He related hadīths on the authority of Mālik b. Anas, among others. He died in 245.⁴

Muhammad b. al-'Alā' b. Kurayb al-Hamadhānī, Abū Kurayb was a teacher of hadīth in Kufa. Al-Ṭabarī is said to have learned over 100,000 hadīths from him. He died about 244.⁵

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- 1) Yqt VI, 431; IHjr IX, 70-73; Sezgin, 113-14; Khtb II, 101-05.
 - 2) Yqt VI, 431; IN, 234; IHjr I, 458 (where he is called al-'Aqadī).
 - 3) Yqt VI, 431; IN, 234; IHjr XI, 70-71; Sezgin, 11; GAL SI, 258.
 - 4) Yqt VI, 431; IN, 234; IHjr I, 335-36.
 - 5) Yqt VI, 431 (where he is called Abū Kurayb b. Muhammad b. al-'Alā' b. Kurayb al-Hamadhānī); IN, 234; IHjr XII, 212.

Hafs b. Salam al-Khurasānī, Abū Muqātil taught Ḥanafī fiqh in Rayy and was also known as an ascetic.¹

Yūnus b. 'Abd al-A'lā al-Miṣrī taught fiqh, probably according to al-Shāfi'ī, from whom he related. He himself was quoted by Muslim, al-Nasā'ī, and Ibn Māja, and is considered trustworthy. He read the Qur'ān according to Warṣh and others, as did his pupil al-Ṭabarī, who also quotes him frequently in the Tafsīr. He died in 264.²

Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abd al-Ḥakam, Abū 'Abd Allāh was a teacher of fiqh in Egypt. Ibn al-Nadīm says that he taught al-Ṭabarī Mālikī fiqh, but elsewhere writes that he quoted al-Shāfi'ī in contrast to the rest of his family. Ibn Ḥajar says that he is considered reliable in both Mālikī and Shāfi'ī fiqh. He was quoted by al-Nasā'ī, and was considered the most knowledgeable man of his time in Egypt for the traditions of the Companions of the Prophet and the Tābi'ūn. He died in 268. His younger brother Sa'd also taught Mālikī fiqh.³

'Abd al-Rahmān b. 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abd al-Ḥakam al-Miṣrī,
Abū al-Qāsim, brother of Muḥammad and Sa'd, taught Mālikī fiqh in Egypt, but is best known as the author of Futūḥ Miṣr,

1) IN, 234; IHjr II, 397-99.

2) IN, 234, which says he taught al-Ṭabarī Mālikī fiqh.
IHjr XI, 440-41, however says that he quoted al-Shāfi'ī
and followed his readings for hadīths.

3) IN, 211, 234; IHjr IX, 260-62; Sezgin, 474; GAL SI, 228.

the oldest surviving work on that subject. It includes information on the history of Egypt through the Muslim conquest, the organization and administration of Egypt, and the Muslim conquest of North Africa and Spain. The last section deals with the Companions of the Prophet who settled in Egypt and quotes the hadīths for which they were responsible. 'Abd al-Rahmān was considered a trustworthy authority, and was quoted by al-Nasā'ī. He died in 257.¹

Al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. al-Ṣabbāḥ al-Za'farānī, Abū 'Abd Allāh was a well-known disciple of al-Shāfi'ī who, however, abridged and introduced some variations into al-Shāfi'ī's al-Mabsūṭ which were regarded unfavourably. He consequently lost his following to al-Rabī' b. Sulaymān (see below), and his works on the subject have been lost. He taught in Baghdad, where he died about 260.²

Al-Rabī' b. Sulaymān al-Murādī was one of the best known students and transmitters of al-Shāfi'ī, and is considered

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- 1) IN, 234; IHjr VI, 208; Sezgin, 355-56; Franz Rosenthal, "Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam", EI² III, 674-75; C. C. Torrey ed., The Futūḥ Miṣr of Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam (New Haven, 1922), introduction; Albert Gateau trans., Conquête de l'Afrique du Nord et de l'Espagne (second ed., Algiers, 1948), 11-38; GAL I, 154, SI, 227-28; Rhuvon Guest ed., The Governors and Judges of Egypt or Kitāb el 'Umarā' (el Wulāh) wa Kitāb al Qudāh of el Kindī (Leiden, 1912), 14-39, especially 22-24.
- 2) IN, 211, 234; IHjr II, 318-19; Sezgin, 491-92; Khtb VII, 407-10.

very reliable, being quoted by al-Nasā'ī, Abū Dā'ūd, Ibn Māja and al-Tirmidhī. He lived in Egypt, where he received a grant from the sultān for giving the call to prayer. Al-Ṭabarī lived with him in Egypt during 256. He died in 270.¹

Dā'ūd b. 'Alī b. Khalaf, Abū Sulaymān was a disciple of al-Shāfi'ī who formed his own madhhab, called the Zāhiriyya. He relied only on the Qur'ān and hadīth, and his madhhab is regarded as an elaboration of al-Shāfi'ī's. Al-Ṭabarī studied with him, but later quarrelled with him violently. He died in 270.²

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Al-Ṭabarī, like most learned men of his day, studied many different subjects, on some of which he composed works. He enjoyed a reputation as an authority in fields such as Qur'ānic exegesis, history, fiqh, hadīth, philology, grammar and syntax, and poetry, all being subjects which were dependent on one another, and a knowledge of which was regarded as essential before a man could attempt to write or teach. Other subjects, such as astrology, mathematics, and medicine were considered necessary for a well-rounded education.

Al-Ṭabarī was a devoted scholar, and spent all of his later years teaching and writing. After his death, his

1) Yqt VI, 434; IN, 211, 234; IHjr III, 245-46.

2) IN, 216-17, 234; Yqt VI, 450; J. Schacht, "Dāwūd b. 'Alī b. Khalaf al-Iṣfahānī Abū Sulaymān", EI² II, 182-83; Sezgin, 521; GAL I, 194-95; Khtb VIII, 369-75.

students added together the number of folio pages which he had written, and dividing by the number of days in his life which he had devoted to writing (said to have been forty years) they found that he had written an average of forty folio pages daily.¹ His day was divided into three parts: from noon until the afternoon prayer he wrote; between the afternoon and evening prayers he gave lessons in the interpretation and reading of the Qur'ān; and after the evening prayers he taught fiqh.² He was a popular and forebearing teacher; it is said that if a student could not attend a lecture, al-Ṭabarī would postpone it until all the students could be present.³ Ibn Isfandiyār gives a vivid picture of his popularity as a teacher:

It is said that 400 riding-camels might daily be seen waiting at the gate of his house in Baghdad, belonging to sons of the caliphs, kings, ministers and amīrs, besides some 30 mules, each watched by an Abyssinian groom, the owners of all these having come thither to glean what they could from Ṭabarī's incomparable learning.⁴

1) Yqt VI, 426.

2) Yqt VI, 460.

3) Yqt VI, 443.

4) Ibn Isfandiyār, An Abridged Translation of the History of Tabaristan (trans. Edward G. Browne, Leiden, 1905), 74.

Probably the best known story about al-Ṭabarī, and one which illustrates his energy as a scholar, is that relating to his writing of the Tafsīr and the Ta'rikh. He asked his students whether they would be interested in a tafsīr of the Qur'ān. Cautiously, they asked how long it would be. When he told them 30,000 folio pages, they said it was much too long for one lifetime, so he reluctantly reduced it to 3,000. Then he asked the same question about a history of the world, from the creation to their own time. Again they asked how long it would be, and again they were told 30,000 folio pages. When they said this also was too long, al-Ṭabarī, evincing disappointment at their lack of enthusiasm, reduced this also to 3,000 folio pages.¹

Although al-Ṭabarī was known as a master in many subjects, his interest lay primarily in fiqh. He studied all the various systems of law, and wrote many works on fiqh, most of which have unfortunately been lost. He formed his own madhhab, called the Jarīriyya, which however lasted only a short time after his death. It seems to have differed very little from that of al-Shāfi'ī, into which it was ultimately absorbed. The Ḥanbalites, a persistent source of trouble

1) Yqt VI, 425. This story seems to be the source of remarks made by some modern scholars that the text which we have today is only one-tenth of what al-Ṭabarī actually wrote. Thus, for example, R. Paret, "al-Ṭabarī", EI IV, 578-79. The story in Yqt implies that al-Ṭabarī had simply planned to write much more, not that he already had.

in Baghdad during this period, were also an irritant to al-Ṭabarī; he refused to accept Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal as an authority on fiqh, although recognizing him on hadīth, and the Ḥanbalites seem to have never forgiven him. On one occasion he was only saved from their wrath by the intervention of the police.¹

The majority of the works written by al-Ṭabarī and mentioned in the biographies deal with fiqh. Even his writing of the Tafsīr and the Ta'rīkh seems to have grown out of this preoccupation; they were written so as to include all the major authorities on the subjects, and as such were obviously intended by their author to be used as reference books for scholars attempting to answer questions of importance to the Islamic community.

In addition to the Ta'rīkh, those of al-Ṭabarī's works which are extant today include:

Jāmi' al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān, considered one of the standard books on the subject, is a collection of traditional exegesis giving historical, lexicographical, grammatical, and legal information. It also includes al-Ṭabarī's own views.²

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- 1) Yqt VI, 436. On aspects of al-Ṭabarī's legal beliefs, see Dominique Sourdel, "Une profession de foi de l'historien al-Ṭabarī", Revue des études islamiques XXXVI (1968), 177-99.
 - 2) Tafsīr al-Qur'ān, 30 parts (Cairo, 1321-30 A.H.); Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī, 16 vols. (ed. Muḥammad Shākir, Cairo, 1954-60 [vols. 1-15] and 1969 [vol. 16]), which is incomplete.

Ikhtilāf al-fuqahā' is a collection of sayings of the fuqahā' of various law schools, including Mālik b. Anas, Sufyān al-Ṭhawrī, al-Shāfi'ī, Abū Ḥanīfa, Abū Yūsuf and al-Awzā'ī.¹

Dhayl al-Mudhayyal gives brief notices of the authorities whom al-Ṭabarī used for his akhbār. What may be an incomplete version of his work is published at the end of the Ta'rīkh.²

Those works of al-Ṭabarī which have not survived include all his writings on his own madhhab: Baṣīṭ al-Qawl, Laṭīf al-Qawl, and al-Khafīf fī al-fiqh; his writings on the reading of the Qur'ān; and his writings on ḥadīth.³

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- 1) Ikhtilāf al-fuqahā' (ed. F. Kern, Cairo, 1320 A. H.); Das Konstantinopler Fragment des Kitāb Iḥtilāf al-Fuqahā' (ed. Joseph Schacht, Leiden, 1933).
 - 2) Paret, op. cit., states that it is an incomplete synopsis but does not say why he believes this to be so.
 - 3) Bibliographies of al-Ṭabarī's writings are found in the notices by Arabic biographers; GAL I, 143-49, SI, 217-18; Sezgin, 323-28.

CHAPTER II

THE TA'RĪKH AL-RUSŪL WA'L-MULŪKSubject matter and sources of the Ta'rīkh

Al-Ṭabarī's Ta'rīkh is regarded in Muslim historiography as a universal or world history, a form of historical writing which seems to have first appeared in the Islamic world about the end of the third century and which al-Ṭabarī himself greatly popularized.¹ Universal histories were written not because most historians were interested in things non-Islamic, but mainly to stress the superiority of Islam and its culture and to demonstrate that Islam was a continuation of, rather than a break with, the past. The fact that most of these universal histories, once having reached the life of Muhammad concentrate almost solely on some aspect of Islamic history

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- 1) Universal or world histories are so called because they begin with the creation of the world and proceed to Biblical, Persian and pre-Islamic Arabic history before the history of Islamic times, which forms the bulk of the work, is presented. Some authors of this type of historical writing also give information on Greek and Roman history, and a few touch on the affairs of Europe, India and other foreign states known to the Muslims. The Akhbār al-ṭiwāl of al-Dīnawarī (d. 282) and the Ta'rīkh of al-Ya'qūbī (d. 284) are regarded as slightly earlier examples of this genre than al-Ṭabarī's massive work. See Franz Rosenthal, A History of Muslim Historiography (Leiden, 1952), 114-30, for a discussion of world histories and historians.

would tend to confirm this view, and shows that the Muslims were not concerned historically with the non-Islamic lands of which they had knowledge.

The subject matter of al-Ṭabarī's Ta'rikh in general follows the pattern of most universal histories. After a short introduction, al-Ṭabarī describes the creation of the world and then gives a history of the Biblical patriarchs, prophets and rulers. All of this section is presented from an Islamic, rather than Biblical, viewpoint and much of the material would have naturally been collected for the Tafsīr. He next turns to pre-Islamic Arabian and Persian history, which are mixed together in a roughly chronological order. Much of the information on the Sāsānids was apparently taken from Arabic versions of the Pahlavi Khudāynāme, which was first translated into Arabic by Ibn al-Muqaffa' in the second century and which, in a later Persian translation, would serve as a source for Firdawsī's Shāhnāme. Al-Ṭabarī probably used an Arabic version which derives from a later translation than that of Ibn al-Muqaffa'.¹

Beginning with the birth of the Prophet, al-Ṭabarī confines his attention to Islam. Based largely on the Sīra of Ibn Ishāq, this section gives the details of Muḥammad's life and preaching. With the hijra, al-Ṭabarī begins the annalistic form which is continued throughout the remainder of the work, through the history of the Rāshidūn and the

1) Theodor Nöldeke, Geschichte der Perser und Araber zur Zeit der Sasaniden (Leiden, 1879), xiii-xxv.

Umayyad and 'Abbāsīd caliphs, to the end of the year 302. In this part of the Ta'rīkh, al-Ṭabarī is mainly concerned with the history of the Islamic umma and those events which he feels are most basically related to the welfare of the umma; he does not, for example, give very detailed accounts of the conquests during the first century after the hijra because he does not consider them of great importance to the umma. At the end of each year, he normally gives the name of the man who led the hajj and the names of the governors and qādīs of each of the important provinces of the central Islamic lands.

Al-Ṭabarī presents his information in the form of akhbār, which like hadīths are each provided with a chain of narrators. Although the material is represented as having been orally transmitted, al-Ṭabarī most certainly used many written texts, some of which he would also have heard orally.¹ Listed below are some of the scholars whose written works

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- 1) For example, al-Ṭabarī copied Ibn Ishāq's Sīra under the guidance of Muḥammad b. Ḥumayd al-Rāzī in Rayy. Ibn Ḥumayd had copied the Sīra under Salama b. al-Faḍl, a pupil of Ibn Ishāq. Thus al-Ṭabarī had heard the work orally, but in all probability used his written text as an aide-mémoire. Yqt VI, 430, says that al-Ṭabarī copied the Sīra under Aḥmad b. Ḥammād, another scholar in Rayy. This must surely be a mistake (easily a copyist's error) as in the Ta'rīkh the last transmitter in the isnāds containing Ibn Ishāq and Salama is invariably Ibn Ḥumayd. See in the Appendix, the chart labelled Badr II.

al-Ṭabarī is known to have used, based on his references to them. Others which are mentioned only rarely are not included.

Muhammad b. Ishāq b. Yasār, Abū 'Abd Allāh was the author of the famous Sīra of the Prophet. He apparently composed the work in two parts, the Kitāb al-Mubtada' and the Kitāb al-Maghāzī, which were later combined and abridged by Ibn Hishām, whose version is the only one known today in an independent form. Al-Ṭabarī used the Sīra extensively for the Prophet's life, and also quoted Ibn Ishāq for the period of the early caliphate, probably from the now lost Kitāb al-Khulafā'. Ibn Ishāq's activities in gathering the material for the Sīra displeased the Medinese scholars of hadīth and fiqh, and Mālik b. Anas is quoted as having called him a Shi'ite and Qadarī. He therefore left Medina and eventually settled in Baghdad, where he died about 150. His reliability in hadīths is a matter of debate, a fact which probably reflects the censure of his contemporaries.¹

Lūṭ b. Yahyā al-Azdī, Abū Mikhnāf was an early muhaddith who is regarded as especially trustworthy on matters relating to Iraq and the Muslim conquests of Iraq and Syria. Almost nothing is known about his life. He wrote over thirty works

1) IHjr IX, 38-46; IN, 92; Yqt VI, 399-401; Khtb I, 214-34; GAL SI, 205-06; Sezgin, 288-90; A. Guillaume trans., The Life of Muhammad (London, 1955), introduction; J. M. B. Jones, "Ibn Ishāq", EI² III, 810-11. W. Montgomery Watt, "The Materials Used by Ibn Ishāq", in Historians of the Middle East (ed. Bernard Lewis and P. M. Holt, London, 1962), distinguishes the various types of information found in the Sīra and the relative importance in determining the historical accuracy of this information.

on events during the first century of Islam, and is quoted extensively throughout al-Ṭabarī. Few of his works have survived to the present day, and those which have are probably later forgeries. He died in 157.¹

Najīh b. 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Sindī, Abū Ma'shar was a slave of Indian origin who purchased his freedom and lived in Medina. He wrote a Kitāb al-Maghāzī which is known through the works of al-Wāqidī and Ibn Sa'd. Al-Ṭabarī took from him material on Biblical history and Muḥammad's life, and used his work especially for chronological statements. He moved to Baghdad about 161 on the invitation of the caliph al-Mahdī, and died there in 170. He is generally regarded as a weak authority.²

Sayf b. 'Umar al-Asadī al-Tamīmī was an authority on the ridda wars. He related hadīths on the authority of Mūsā b. 'Uqba, Ibn Ishāq and Muḥammad al-Kalbī, and is the main source of al-Ṭabarī for the ridda and the early conquests, on which he composed a book named the Kitāb al-Futūḥ al-Kabīr wa'l-Ridda. He is regarded as a weak authority, and died in 180.³

Muḥammad b. al-Sā'ib b. Bishr al-Kalbī, Abū al-Nadr was a Kufan scholar who was considered an authority on tafsīr and

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- 1) IN, 93; Yqt VI, 220-22; GAL I, 64, SI, 101-02; Sezgin, 308-09. For an explanation of Abū Mikhnāf's role in Islamic historiography, see Ursula Sezgin, op. cit.
 - 2) IHjr X, 419-22; Khtb XIII, 427-31; IN, 93; GAL SI, 207; Sezgin 291.
 - 3) IHjr IV, 295-96; IN, 94; J. Wellhausen, Skizzen und Vorarbeiten VI (Berlin, 1899), 3-7; GAL SI, 213; Sezgin, 311-12.

the history and genealogy of the Arabs. His son, Hishām, Abū al-Mundhir, continued his father's work in history and genealogy and is credited with numerous works, few of which survive today. Both father and son are universally regarded by Muslim authorities as being very unreliable; some modern scholars, however, feel that this reputation is largely undeserved. Al-Ṭabarī took material on Persia and Hira from both men. Muhammad died in 146 and Hishām about 204.¹

Muhammad b. 'Umar al-Wāqidī, Abū 'Abd Allāh was a recognized authority on the maghāzī, sīra, the early conquests, fiqh, and especially history. He transmitted material on the authority of al-Awzā'ī, Mālik b. Anas, al-Thawrī and Abū Ma'shār, and was himself quoted by al-Shāfi'ī and Ibn Sa'd, his kātib (see below). Although considered very reliable in history and fiqh, he is not accepted by authorities as trustworthy in hadīth proper. Al-Ṭabarī frequently quotes him, especially for the Prophet's life, the conquests, and other events of the first two centuries of Islam, much of which apparently was taken from his work entitled al-Ta'rīkh al-Kabīr; the only one of his writings to have survived independently is his Kitāb al-Maghāzī. He found favour with both Hārūn al-Rashīd and al-Ma'mūn, who appointed him qādī of one quarter of Baghdad, and was a close friend of Hārūn's

1) Muhammad: IHjr IX, 178-81; IN, 95; GAL I, 144-45; Sezgin, 34. Hishām: IN, 95-98; Yqt VII, 250-54; Khtb XIV, 45-46; GAL I, 144-45, SI, 211-12; Sezgin, 268-71. On the reputation of the two men, see Nöldeke, op. cit., xxvii.

wazīr Yahyā al-Barmakī. Ibn al-Nadīm states that he was a Shi'ite, and although no other biographer gives this information, his writings do seem to confirm Shi'ī tendencies. He died in Baghdad in 207.¹

Muhammad b. Sa'd b. Manī', Abū 'Abd Allāh, known as kātib al-Wāqidī, with whom he studied and whose work formed the basis for Ibn Sa'd's own Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt, a history of the Prophet, his Companions and the Tābi'ūn down to his own time. He was quoted by Ibn Abī al-Dunyā and al-Balādhurī and is considered reliable. He is quoted in al-Ṭabarī most often as the transmitter of al-Wāqidī, but material of his own is also used. He died in Baghdad in 230.²

'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Madā'inī, Abū al-Ḥasan was a scholar of history and adab, who is credited with having written over two hundred works on these subjects. His Kitāb Akhbār al-Khulafā' al-Kabīr and his works on the Khawārij were used by al-Ṭabarī, but his Kitāb Futūḥ Khurasān, the subject on which, together with India and Persia, he is considered a reliable authority, is the work which al-Ṭabarī quoted most extensively. His death is dated variously as between 215 and 235; 225 seems to be the one most generally agreed upon.³

1) IHjr IX, 363-68; IN, 93, 98-99; Yqt VII, 55-58; Khtb III, 3-21; GAL I, 141, SI, 207-08; Sezgin, 294-97; Marsden Jones, ed., The Kitāb al-Maghāzī of al-Wāqidī I (London, 1966), introduction.

2) IHjr IX, 182-83; Khtb V, 321-22; IN, 99; GAL I, 142-43, SI, 28; Sezgin, 300-01.

3) Yqt V, 309-18; IN, 93, 100-04; Khtb XII, 54-55; GAL I, 146, SI, 214-15; Sezgin, 314-15.

'Umar b. Shabba al-Numayrī, Abū Zayd, a Basran scholar who lived in Baghdad, was an authority on the sīra and history. He was quoted by Ibn Māja, al-Balādhurī and Ibn Abī al-Dunyā. His writings on the history and notable men of various cities were used by al-Ṭabarī, especially for information on Basra. He is often mentioned by al-Ṭabarī as the transmitter of al-Madā'inī. He refused to profess the Mu'tazilite doctrine of the createdness of the Qur'ān during al-Ma'mūn's caliphate and was thus accused of kufr. He is considered reliable and accurate by authorities, and died in Baghdad about 262.¹

Aḥmad b. Abī Ṭāhir Ṭayfūr, Abū al-Faḍl was an historian and adīb in Baghdad. According to Ibn al-Nadīm he was well-known for reciting poetry, which however he is said to have done very badly, and for compiling books. Most of his works dealt with poetry and literature, and have been lost. Of his Ta'rīkh Baghdād, which al-Ṭabarī used extensively, only the sixth volume has survived. He related historical material on the authority of 'Umar b. Shabba, and died in Baghdad in 280.²

Continuations, Abridgements and Translations of the Ta'rīkh

There are two known continuations of the Ta'rīkh. 'Arīb b. Sa'd al-Qurṭubī (d. 370), kātib of the Spanish Umayyad Caliph al-Ḥakam II, abridged the Ta'rīkh and added information

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- 1) IHjr VII, 460-61; Khtb XI, 208-10; Yqt VI, 48-49; IN, 112-13; GAL I, 137, SI, 209; Sezgin, 345-46.
 - 2) Khtb IV, 211-12; Yqt I, 152-57; IN, 145-46; GAL I, 144, SI, 210; Sezgin, 348-49.

of his own for the years 291-320.¹ 'Abd Allāh b. Aḥmad b. Ja'far al-Farghānī (d. 362) was a student of al-Ṭabarī; he later moved to Egypt, where he wrote al-Ṣila as a continuation of the Ta'rīkh.²

The first abridgement and translation of the Ta'rīkh was done by Abū 'Alī Muḥammad b. Muḥammad Bal'amī, the wazīr of the Sāmānid Amīr al-Mansūr b. Nūh, in 352. Bal'amī left out all the isnāds, combined the differing reports which al-Ṭabarī gave of a single event into a continuous narrative, added some information from other sources, and translated his abbreviated version into Persian. This work, one of the earliest specimens of modern Persian which has survived to

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- 1) Charles Pellat, "Arīb b. Sa'd al-Kātib al-Qurṭubī", EI² I, 628. 'Arīb's continuation of the Ta'rīkh has been published: the sections relating to the central Islamic lands in Arīb Tabarī Cōtinuatus (ed. M. J. de Goeje, Leiden 1897), and in the last volume of both Cairo editions of the Ta'rīkh; the sections dealing with Spain are found in Ibn 'Idhārī, Histoire de l'Afrique, et de l'Espagne, intitulée al-Bayano'l-Mogrib, par Ibn-Adhārī, de Maroc, et fragments de la Chronique d'Arīb, de Cordue 2 vols. (ed. R. Dozy, Leiden, 1848-51).
 - 2) Franz Rosenthal, "al-Farghānī", EI² II, 793. His continuation has been lost, except for a fragment dealing with an event during the reign of the 'Abbāsīd caliph al-Muqtadir (d. 320), which is published in Nabia Abbott, Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri I (Chicago, 1957).

us, was translated into Ottoman Turkish in the sixth century, and into Chagatay Turkish and Arabic in the ninth century.¹

The Arabic original of the Ta'rīkh has been translated into modern Turkish and Urdu, but only short extracts are available in European languages.²

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- 1) D. M. Dunlop, "Bal'amī", EI² I, 984-85. C. A. Storey, Persian Literature (London, 1935), 61-65, lists the manuscripts, printed editions and translations of Bal'amī's work. Sezgin, 327, has a more up-to-date list of the translations. On various aspects of Bal'amī's work as it is preserved today, see P. A. Gryaznevich and A. N. Bolduirev, "O dvukh redaktisaykh 'Ta'rīkh-i Ṭabarī' Bal'amī", Sovetskoe Vostokovedenie 3 (1957), 46-59.
- 2) Sezgin, 327, lists the various translations.

CHAPTER III

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE TA'RĪKHVocabulary and Style

Because the information in the Ta'rīkh was taken from so many different sources, both written and oral, which were reproduced verbatim by al-Ṭabarī, a study of the vocabulary and style is much more difficult than it would be in those works in which an author combined and paraphrased his sources so as to produce a continuous narrative. In the Ta'rīkh, therefore, one cannot expect to find uniformity of style and vocabulary usage throughout; these aspects will vary from one section to the next, depending on when and where the akhbār originated. For example, the style and vocabulary of a khavar concerning the Prophet will differ from those of a khavar about Hārūn al-Rashīd, presuming that both akhbār originated contemporaneously to the events they discuss.

Therefore, a detailed study of style and vocabulary in the Ta'rīkh would involve a meticulous study of al-Ṭabarī's sources and a careful comparison of other writings of a similar nature from the same periods; furthermore, since al-Ṭabarī generally confines himself to repeating his sources verbatim, such a study would throw little light upon his own style of writing and vocabulary usage.

There are, however, a few general observations which may be made about vocabulary and style in the Ta'rīkh. In

general, the vocabulary would seem to be fairly straightforward in usage, with few archaic or rare words being used. It is to be presumed that the vocabulary of the akhbār would have been comprehensible not only to al-Ṭabarī but also to most educated men of the time, and that any word or phrase which would give difficulty would have been commented on and explained, perhaps in a written gloss or in an oral explanation by a teacher. It is hard to believe that al-Ṭabarī himself would have actually changed words within a khavar, as this would be totally alien to his training as a muhaddith. Furthermore, the fact that those sections of the Ta'rīkh which can be compared with their sources show that the borrowing was largely verbatim.

As with the vocabulary, the style of writing in the various akhbār would seem to be consistent with that of the periods in which they originated or were first collected and written down. Different styles within one given period may be attributed to such factors as the nature of transmission, i.e. whether or not the khavar had been passed on orally for some time before being written down; and the nature of the information, i.e. whether the material comes from a khutba or other speech, a document, or from a non-Arabic source which had been translated into Arabic.

Poetry in the Ta'rīkh

In al-Ṭabari's time, as well as earlier, poetry was a subject with which all men of culture and intellect were expected to be familiar, and which many educated men practiced. One needs only to consider the number of caliphs and courtiers who are remembered for their verses, and the patronage which poets found at court, to realize that poetry was a mode of expression which was prized highly and the composition of which was a commendable occupation.

To modern eyes, classical Arabic poetry may sometimes be found repetitive and dull, limited as it was by rules of prosody set down in the third century and adhered to until recently; especially constricting were conventions, largely based on pre-Islamic poetry, which set patterns for the development of the verse, no matter what its subject matter. Although many poets attempted to satirize or even ignore these conventions, the majority followed them and produced a mass of poetry which, while correct in its technical aspects, is not really great (or even good) verse.

One finds throughout the Ta'rīkh many poems, or lines from poems, which are used to clarify or emphasize a certain detail or a man's role or personality. Although most of these verses are quite short, they may sometimes be so lengthy that they actually become the narrative, rather than being subsidiary to it, a notable example being the account of the siege of Baghdad.¹ The vast majority of this poetry was composed by

1) TT III, 873-80.

lesser poets, and only rarely is one of wide reputation quoted. However, the quality of the verses in the Ta'rīkh is much less important to this study than the quantity.

If we accept that every educated man felt at ease with poetry, it becomes easier to understand why poetry was included in an historical work. Verse added to the prose would make a history such as the Ta'rīkh more interesting stylistically, lending to the bald factuality an imaginative quality that would often be as impressive in the concise and epigrammatic nature of its statement. Although it is sometimes difficult to tell whether the poetry in the Ta'rīkh forms a part of the khabar or whether al-Ṭabarī himself added it, its inclusion in an historical work tends to elevate it from conventional narrative into the area of literature; and, indeed, history was to become almost the unique vehicle for "creative" prose writing for centuries to come in both Persian and Turkish.

Since the poetry in the Ta'rīkh serves to emphasize and clarify, it is possible that people of the time accepted it as merely an alternative form of expression which could serve the same purpose as prose, and did not distinguish between the two to the extent that we do today. Although much of this poetry is eulogistic and exaggerated, it may have been accepted as contributing towards one's conception of a person's character as much as any khabar in prose. What we today may think of as fulsomeness in such eulogies would, of course, have seemed quite different to the readers for whom they were written; in fact, eulogy was as much a convention of poetic literature as any of its other features and, like these, provided

a means whereby the poet could exercise and display his verbal ingenuity. The very hyperbole should demand that it be accepted in this light, for otherwise the recipient of such encomia would have felt them to be veiled sarcasm.

Except for the form of expression which the material may take, there is much in common between verse and the use of akhbār to relate an event; both are anecdotal in nature, and the reader's reaction to both could depend on the reputation of the author. Furthermore, both were the product of an oral tradition and were designed, at least in early times, to be memorized and recited, not read.

Verbs of transmission

The isnād which is prefixed to each khavar in the Ta'rīkh always begins with a verb, of which about half a dozen in various forms are commonly used.¹ These verbs will be discussed in three groups: 1) verbs of direct transmission; 2) verbs of indirect transmission; and 3) passive and impersonal passive verbs. By examining the first transmitter named in the isnād we should be able to discover what is meant by the verb connected with that person and thus learn whether

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- 1) Occasionally an isnād is found in the matn of the khavar, introduced by the phrases fīmā or kamā followed by the verb. This may simple be a matter of style and is here treated as a prefixed isnād.

al-Ṭabarī heard the kh̄bar orally or had to rely only on a written source. In addition, the verbs comprising the last two groups may help us to understand some aspects of al-Ṭabarī's own views.¹ It should be noted that these verbs almost invariably occur in the perfect tense; and that although many of them imply oral transmission, this does not preclude the possibility that a great majority of the information would also have been used by al-Ṭabarī from a written text, as was mentioned in the last chapter. Furthermore, this discussion is meant to apply only to the first verb in the isnād, the one which al-Ṭabarī would have added; the verbs referring to earlier authorities in the isnād would have already been fixed by previous transmitters and may, therefore, reflect the usage of an earlier period.

1) Verbs of direct transmission

haddatha

Probably the most common verb of transmission found in the Ta'rīkh, this verb means to relate or tell, and implies oral transmission. As the authorities mentioned with this verb are men either known to have been heard by al-Ṭabarī, or who lived in one of the cities which al-Ṭabarī visited and died at dates late enough to insure the feasibility of his having heard them, there seems to be no reason that this verb

1) With the exceptions of rawā and the various forms of the verb akhbara, all the verbs discussed are found in the five sections of the Ta'rīkh which are used to illustrate the statements and theories in this thesis. These verbs are to be found in the charts in the Appendix, where they are placed directly beneath the name of the last transmitter in the isnād.

should not be taken literally. It usually occurs with one of the pronominal suffixes, -nā or -nī, the first perhaps indicating that the authority was lecturing to a class, the latter that he gave his information to al-Ṭabarī alone.

akhbara

This verb is rarely used by al-Ṭabarī himself, although it is found in connection with earlier authorities in the isnāds. It may be used to indicate that the authority cited was not accepted by scholars as an authority on ḥadīth (in which case the verb haddatha would be expected), but as a scholar of akhbār, i.e. strictly historical information. It is also used with the pronominal suffixes -nā and -nī, with the probable meanings discussed above under haddatha.

kataba

As a verb of transmission, kataba occurs infrequently in the Ta'rīkh. Al-Ṭabarī uses it mainly in connection with one authority, al-Sarī b. Yaḥyā, upon whom he relies for a great deal of information concerning the Rāshidūn, in the phrase kataba ilayya al-Sariyyu 'an The very fact that al-Ṭabarī distinguishes the direct transmission of information as being either oral or written shows that he felt it important to inform his readers in what form he received his material, a distinction which few other writers, whether earlier or later, made.

2) Verbs of indirect transmission

qāla¹

This verb is generally used with only one authority

1) This discussion is not meant to apply to those places where qāla/

or with a short isnād, and the khābar which follows is usually short and concerns a variation of some point which has been mentioned in a longer khābar preceding it. As it is most frequently found with such names as al-Wāqidī, al-Madā'inī, or Abū Mikhnaf, with no intervening authorities, it seems to denote that al-Ṭabarī used a written text rather than an oral source. As most of these authorities are cited elsewhere in complete isnāds, al-Ṭabarī perhaps had to resort to written texts for material he had never heard orally or which he may have heard but had to check in the written text; furthermore, this would seem to indicate either that he did not have his own copy of the text or that he had a text which had been written from another copy, as if he had copied it himself from an oral source he would have used either haddathā or akhbara to indicate this.

dhakara

Since this verb is almost always found in the same situations as qāla, it would seem to be merely a stylistic variant.

cont'd: qāla obviously refers to the preceding isnād, or to the phrase qāla Abū Ja'far, which is simply al-Ṭabarī's way of legitimizing an isnād whose sole authority is himself. This expression may be used either to conceal his authorities, which seems rather unlikely, as he does not generally hesitate to name them, and would be a practice alien to his training, or most probably as a means for embodying popular legend or even his own theories.

za'ama

Rarely used, za'ama means to assert or claim, and casts doubt upon the information. It is usually found with a single authority and the khabar is short, introducing a variation into the story being told. As there does not seem to be any reason for using this verb other than to create suspicion, it can probably be taken literally. Al-Ṭabarī may have used it to show that a certain authority could not always be trusted or to indicate his own view of a point which may have been adopted by a certain political, religious, or social group, or which was part of popular legend.

rawā

Al-Ṭabarī himself very rarely uses this verb; it is generally found in passages which were added to the Ta'rīkh by unknown persons at a later date.¹ It is probably used simply in the sense of "to relate", without the technical meaning which haddaṭṭha or akbbara would imply.

3) Passive and impersonal passive verbs

huddiḥtu ('an)

The passive of haddaṭṭha is always used in the first person singular and may be followed by a chain of authorities. Used by itself, it implies that al-Ṭabarī obtained the information orally but without an isnād attached to it; with an isnād, it still implies an oral transmission, but one which could be traced back to known authorities. In both cases, it is rather hard to understand why al-Ṭabarī uses this verb

1) For examples of the use of this verb, see TT II, 1368-72.

except to indicate the oral nature of the transmission; it may be that he felt the material to be more important than that to which he attached the other verbs discussed below.

dhukira ('an)

This verb is used in much the same way as huddiḥtu, with or without a chain of authorities. When it is followed by the name of an authority, it generally implies that al-Ṭabarī consulted a written work for the information, and is similar in usage to qāla. Dhukira ('an) is most commonly used in the latter part of the Ta'rīkh for the history of the 'Abbāsids, and thus may be used by al-Ṭabarī to deliberately conceal his sources or to convey popular stories.

ruwiya

This verb is extremely rare; it seems to be used simply as the passive of rawā, and the remarks made concerning that verb apply to its passive also.

Al-Ṭabarī's Methodology and Attitudes

In those sections of the Ta'rīkh which have been isolated for the purpose of this study, emphasis will be laid on the technique of reporting followed by al-Ṭabarī - his use of isnāds and his placement of akhbār - and on the way in which he selects from his sources. It is the presumption of this present study that a personal element cannot be discounted in the preparation of a work such as the Ta'rīkh; dealing as it does with human activities in periods of achievement and failure, it seems proper to speculate upon what may probably have been al-Ṭabarī's own attitude to the materials he apparently transmits with such impartiality.

Dhū Qār

The battle of Dhū Qār is generally regarded as the last of the series of incidents which are known under the name ayyām al-'Arab; it is considered the first battle in which a group of Arab tribes defeated other Arabs who were reinforced by regular Persian troops, the importance of which will be discussed below. As with so many of the ayyām, Dhū Qār quickly passed into popular legend and generated a great deal of poetry and many stories, and it is for this literary contribution that it is generally remembered today.

In addition to al-Ṭabarī, the only other early source is the Kitāb al-Aghānī.¹ Secondary source material is equally

1) Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, Kitāb al-Aghānī XX (ed. Naṣr al-Hūrīnī, Bulāq, 1868), 132-40; II, 22-31.

scanty; the battle is mentioned by Rothstein and Caussin de Perceval in their histories of the pre-Islamic era, but few, if any, conclusions are drawn and the incident stands as merely one more event in the chronological accounts of the time.¹

The account in the Ta'rīkh is lengthy; the majority of it is concerned with the causes of the battle and, while there are no dates given, obviously covers several years. It begins with a saying of Muḥammad that he aided the Arabs in defeating the Persians, and then mentions the various names by which the battle was known, all of which are in the vicinity of Dhū Qār itself.²

The next khābar, from Abū 'Ubayda, states that the cause of Dhū Qār was the killing of 'Adī b. Zayd al-'Ibādī, an interpreter for the Persian king Kisrā Abruwīz, by the Lakhmid king al-Nu'mān b. al-Mundhir. This is followed by a very long khābar from Hishām al-Kalbī which gives details of 'Adī's service at Kisrā's court and al-Nu'mān's being chosen by Kisrā to be king of Hira.³ It goes on to relate of 'Adī's imprisonment by al-Nu'mān, and al-Nu'mān's death after an abortive revolt against Kisrā.

1) G. Rothstein, Die Dynastie der Lakhmiden in al-Hīra (Berlin, 1899), 120-23; A. P. Caussin de Perceval, Essai sur l'histoire des Arabes avant l'Islamisme II (Paris, 1847), 161-82.

2) TT I, 1015-16.

3) TT I, 1016-29.



The last section tells of the immediate events leading up to the battle and of the battle itself, again on the authority of Abū 'Ubayda.¹ The account of the actual battle is fragmentary and disjointed, and includes much poetry praising various Arab clans and individuals.

The first thing to note about this account is that one does not find here the insistence upon dates which so marks later passages. As al-Ṭabarī was primarily concerned with the Islamic period and used the hijrī system of dating for that period, and as the pre-Islamic Arabs had no reliable method for calculating dates, it is no surprise that the historical sections of the pre-Islamic era in the Ta'rīkh have no dates to speak of. However, the fact that the Prophet is quoted twice gives the indication that the battle took place sometime after Muḥammad received his first revelation and proclaimed himself the prophet of Allāh.

The number of names given is also significant. As we shall see in other sections, the names of participants are especially important to the Muslims because this allowed their descendants to claim a place of honour in Islamic society. As for the names of participants in a pre-Islamic battle, these would also confer upon the descendants respect, especially those whose sympathies lay with the older, Arab Muslims in the Shu'ūbiyya controversy. Claiming descent from a pre-Islamic ancestor who took part in a defeat of the foreigners who had long attempted to control the Arabs and who had since been defeated again by these same Arabs, now Muslims, may have

1) TT I, 1029-37.

marked a man as a sort of "nationalist", in the sense that he adhered to the old ties of kinship which were so important to the Arabs. Furthermore, it has been noted by Caetani that the Bakr b. Wā'il tribe, the victors at Dhū Qār, emboldened by their success over the Persians, later made the first incursions into Iraq.¹ Thus their Muslim descendants would, perhaps, have felt that this entitled them to a special respect in their society.

The large amount of poetry to be found in this section is characteristic of the way in which information about such heroic activities was transmitted amongst the pre-Islamic Arabs. In al-Ṭabarī's own day poetry was the dominant cultural activity of a society that, because of its religion, was deprived of most other means of aesthetic experience, and it would therefore have occupied much of the attention of cultured men. While today these large inclusions of verse may appear in some way to distort the balance and tone of the Ta'rīkh, to the contemporary reader they would appear merely as an alternative form of expression, the contents of which were to be treated with the same seriousness as any of the prose sections. While in this instance the verse sections are to be regarded as being primarily informative, those other numerous inclusions of poetry throughout the Ta'rīkh all serve to make or reaffirm points which are thereby given a prominence and memorability which they might otherwise have lacked. To al-Ṭabarī himself it would have seemed quite natural to use

1) Leone Caetani, Annali dell'Islam I (Milan, 1905), 238.

poetry, especially as verse would have been the only primary source to which he had recourse.

Al-Ṭabarī utilizes in this account the works of two scholars acknowledged as authorities on the pre-Islamic period - Hishām b. Muḥammad al-Kalbī and Abū 'Ubayda. As these two men collected their material from Arabic sources, it is no surprise that the account should be in favour of the Arabs. Furthermore, the fact that the Prophet is credited with having aided the Arabs against the Persians, which is not to be taken as material aid but rather as a sort of spiritual help, implies that Dhū Qār was considered important in Islamic times because it "prefigured in it the victory of Islam over the Persians".¹ Al-Ṭabarī quite probably included this battle in the Ta'rīkh for this very purpose, as he generally has very little information on the ayyām.

The account in the Kitāb al-Aghānī follows similar outlines to those of the Ta'rīkh, especially in the first part. Al-Ṭabarī uses Hishām b. al-Kalbī for the opening part of this section, that concerned with the events which led to the battle, and then employs accounts from Abū 'Ubayda for the battle itself. In contrast, Abū al-Faraj bases his information mainly on Ibn al-Kalbī, and then adds details from other sources; the emphasis is almost entirely on the causes of the battle and the description of the fighting is very short and uninformative. It is in the second part of the account that these two sources diverge. By using Abū 'Ubayda as his chief informant

1) Goldziher, op. cit. I, 100.

for the most proximate cause of the battle and the fighting itself, al-Ṭabarī gives the impression that Kisrā precipitated the crisis by demanding al-Nu'mān's money and weapons from Bakr b. Wā'il. Abū al-Faraj, on the other hand, gives a long and detailed account which clearly indicates that Kisrā was forced to fight the Arab tribe because a dispute for its leadership had led the various clans to raid each other and to cause a great deal of destruction in the area. Al-Ṭabarī mentions nothing of this, and if we look more closely at the structure of the section, a reason for this omission becomes apparent. He begins his account with the quotation from the Prophet mentioned above, which is thus implanted in the reader's mind as the most significant point about this battle. Abū al-Faraj, however, leaves this saying until the very end of his account, as though it were an interesting footnote but not really relevant. Thus al-Ṭabarī has committed himself to a line of thought which makes it imperative that Kisrā be seen as the villain of the piece, whereas Abū al-Faraj, by making no mention of this saying until the end, can use information showing not only that the Arabs brought the trouble on themselves, but that the very reason al-Ṭabarī gives as the precipitating cause of the battle is only a very small incident indirectly connected to the immediate circumstances.

Finally, one must consider al-Ṭabarī's own feelings about Dhū Qār. Although we have no information about his ancestors, it is not unlikely that, born in Tabaristan, he was of Persian origin. It is true that during his own lifetime it was the eastern, Persian provinces which had broken away from the central government in Baghdad and in which a small revival

of Persian culture was taking place; indeed, less than fifty years after his death, the Ta'riḫ was translated into Persian. Yet al-Ṭabarī's entire upbringing and education seems to have been founded in the traditional Islamic disciplines; he travelled widely throughout the Arab lands and only twice returned to his own province. It is futile and misleading to introduce modern notions of nationalism into this period, when such concepts were totally lacking both in individuals and in communities. What loyalties al-Ṭabarī may have had to a region or to a people would have been more particular, probably limited to a sentimental affection for the region of his birth and early childhood; that he would consciously identify himself with all the diverse provinces that now constitute the national state of Iran, even if there were some recognizable linguistic affinity between them, is contrary to all we know of the political and social behaviour at this time.¹ What could be roughly

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- 1) I cannot agree with Irfan Shahīd's statements that because of al-Ṭabarī's Persian origins he "had a natural interest in the history of the people to whom he belonged, especially their glorious pre-Islamic past; ... His interest in the eastern rather than in the western half of the Empire was only natural ...". Al-Ṭabarī's interest in the eastern provinces more probably grew out of their proximity to Baghdad and the pre-occupation of the central government with them to the detriment of the west. Irfan Shahīd, "Theodor Nöldeke's 'Geschichte der Perser und Araber zur Zeit der Sasaniden': An Evaluation", International Journal of Middle East Studies VIII (1977), 117-22.

equated to present-day national feeling might, in the first instance, be the distinction between the Muslim and the non-Muslim, with a subdivision of the first into the old Arab Muslim groupings and the neo-Muslims; a further diversification might be seen in the latter group in its division into those heretical sects which are loosely given the general classification of Shī'ite. However, what is to be noted here is that Islam, and not any of those other features which contribute to modern nationalisms, is the distinctive element of differentiation.

It would seem that to al-Ṭabarī, the significance of Dhū Qār might lie not so much in the fact that Arabs defeated Persians, but in the symbolic victory of the people who would shortly become Muslims; furthermore, the very Persians who were defeated would also convert to Islam within a few decades. Perhaps then he saw this battle as the last in a series of incidents between Arabs and Persians, barring of course the conquest of the Persian lands by the Arab Muslims; he may have felt that the consequences of the battle were the most significant thing about it, that both Arabs and Persians were ultimately assimilated into one society, founded upon Islam, whose entrance requirements were not based on race, language or culture, but in the submission of one's will to the one true God.

As has been noted, in al-Ṭabarī's own time the eastern provinces had largely broken with the central government in Baghdad and had embarked upon autonomous rule. It may have been with this very situation in mind that he included Dhū Qār

in the Ta'rikh; if he truly felt that Islam was not only a religion but also a society which could accommodate and assimilate all people, then he must also have believed that such a society could only function properly if it were united under one head, the deputy of the Prophet of God. Thus we would have here an example of al-Ṭabarī's idealism, that all Muslims belong to one society, founded by Muḥammad and inspired by God, which is therefore the perfect society; but one feels that this is also symptomatic of his hopes, that this society will one day again be united and follow the pattern for peaceful living which God had intended for it.

Badr

The battle of Badr was a crucial point for Muḥammad in his fight for recognition as prophet and messenger of the monotheistic religion of Allāh. At first Muḥammad had been reluctant to fight the Meccans, but once it was decided to do so he quickly planned the strategy for the battle which led to the Muslim victory over a larger enemy force, the death of the majority of leading Meccans, and the capture of many important prisoners who were then held to ransom. The outcome of the battle did little to change immediately the existing politico-religious situation in central Arabia, but it proved to the Meccans that Muḥammad and his followers constituted a graver threat than they had realized, gave the Muslims a much needed boost of self-confidence, and allowed Muḥammad to consolidate his own position vis-à-vis the Medinan tribes.

The primary sources for the battle are Ibn Ishāq's Sīra, in the recension of Ibn Hishām, and al-Wāqidī's Kitāb al-Maghāzī, written half a century later. Al-Ṭabarī's account of Badr relies heavily on Ibn Ishāq, but in the recension of Salama b. al-Faḍl, which has not survived to us today except in the Ta'rikh. He uses al-Wāqidī to a much lesser extent, quoting him mainly for various small details which are not mentioned or are different from Ibn Ishāq. In addition, al-Ṭabarī also uses what is probably the oldest surviving written account of the battle, a letter from 'Urwa b. al-Zubayr to the Caliph 'Abd al-Malik (d. 86).

Secondary source material on the battle has a long history, beginning with the earliest western biographies of Muḥammad. However, due to the fact that the majority of al-Ṭabarī's Ta'rikh was presumed to be lost for a long time, the first scholar to have access to all three basic sources was William Muir. In his The Life of Mahomet, he closely follows Ibn Ishāq and al-Ṭabarī in recounting the battle, and while he ventures little critical comment, his account is an admirable summary of the Arabic sources.¹ Tor Andrae preferred to base his account of the battle more on al-Wāqidī than the other sources, and stresses that the Muslim victory at Badr led to the formulation of the principle which made Islam after the Prophet's death an all-conquering religion

1) William Muir, The Life of Mahomet III (London, 1861), 82-128. His comments on the three basic sources are found in I, lxxxix-cv.

in the Middle East.¹ More recent scholars, such as W. Montgomery Watt and Maxime Rodinson, have shown a more cautious approach to the results of the battle and have emphasized that it allowed Muḥammad to consolidate his position in Medina and that the Meccans began to realize that the Muslims constituted a serious threat to their influence.²

The account of Badr in the Ta'rikh opens with various opinions on the date on which the battle took place.³ Two akhbār which originate with 'Abd Allāh b. Mas'ūd are quoted in support of the 19th of Ramaḍān, followed by one from Zayd b. Thābit also confirming the 19th. Three akhbār are then introduced, all from Ibn Mas'ūd, the first of which appears to state that the battle was fought on the 17th Ramaḍān but is then modified to say it may have been the 19th or 21st; the last two both support the 19th. The last three akhbār in this section, from 'Āṣim b. 'Umar b. Qatada and Yazīd b. Rūmān, Zayd b. Thābit and al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, all give the 17th Ramaḍān as the date. There are, thus, five akhbār which give the 19th, three the 17th, and one the 17th, 19th or 21st. All nine akhbār are given by trustworthy authorities, companions or relatives of the Prophet or their immediate descendants, and at first glance it would seem

1) Tor Andrae, Mohammed, The Man and His Faith (trans. Theophil Menzel, London, 1936), 201-07.

2) W. Montgomery Watt, Muhammad at Medina (Oxford, 1956), 10-17; Maxime Rodinson, Mohammed (trans. Anne Carter, paperback ed., Harmondsworth, England, 1973), 164-70.

3) TT I, 1282-84.

that there is little to choose between them. However, when one notices that the 19th Ramaḍān is mentioned first and that the akhbār in favour of the 17th are last (leaving out the khabar from Ibn Mas'ūd which mentions three dates and whose support for any one of them is thus negated), it seems more reasonable to suppose that al-Ṭabarī himself preferred the 19th Ramaḍān. When a person reads this section, the first date mentioned is the one that would tend to stay in his mind, any other date being dismissed as not conforming to the first. In addition, the three akhbār giving the 17th Ramaḍān as the date of the battle are longer and more detailed than those supporting the 19th (with the exception of the one from Zayd); it seems fair to say that these three akhbār may therefore be of slightly later date than the others, and are more detailed because they oppose akhbār already in existence and in favour of the 19th as the day of Badr.

The second question on this section is why al-Ṭabarī felt it necessary to devote so much space and attention to determining the day of the month on which Badr was fought. Throughout the Ta'rīkh we find this problem of determining dates and ages receiving a noticeable amount of attention. It seems likely that, at least in al-Ṭabarī's time, ta'rīkh was still regarded in its etymological meaning as chronology, the determination of dates and the ages of notable people; and that the basic function of the mu'arrikh was to chronicle events and the personalities involved therein according to

dates.¹ When one considers the way in which earlier works were written, such as Ibn Ishāq's Sīra, the use of dating as the primary framework of a work becomes apparent.

The next five akhbār give details of the incidents which led the Muslims to fight at Badr.² The first is a letter from 'Urwa b. al-Zubayr to the Caliph 'Abd al-Malik which is regarded as the oldest surviving account of the battle; the second khābar originates with 'Ali b. Abī Ṭālib. Both accounts mention that the Prophet deduced the strength of the Quraysh who were coming to protect Abū Sufyān's caravan by learning from a captured slave the number of animals needed to feed them every day. The repetition of this incident gives the reader the impression that Muḥammad, while drawing his belief and strength from God, is also a shrewd man and a not inconsiderable tactician. Thus the two akhbār are complementary to each other, and provide a preview of the battle itself. In addition, the end of the second khābar also gives

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- 1) Cf. Rosenthal, A History of Muslim Historiography, 13-14. The fact that few early historical works contain dates does not necessarily mean that dating was not considered a primary function of the mu'arrikh; dating may have simply meant putting events in the proper relationship to each other, and not necessarily recording the day, month or year according to a certain calendar.
- 2) TT I, 1284-92.

the reader an introduction to a series of events which are to be told later, all of which involve miraculous happenings during the battle. The third and fourth akhbār, also given on the authority of 'Alī, are short additions of details, and stress the devoutness of the Muslims and the Prophet before the battle. The fifth khābar is from Ibn Ishāq and names some of the Quraysh who were with Abū Sufyān; with this account the action switches from the Muslims to the Meccans.

The following three akhbār, all from Ibn Ishāq, concentrate on the decision of the Meccans to send out a large party to protect the caravan from the Muslims.¹ The first deals with the vision of 'Ātika which foretold the disaster at Badr; while this omen frightened some of the Meccans, others, notably Abū Jahl, scoffed and made fun of the Banū 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib for producing another prophet. When the warning comes that Muḥammad is planning to attack the caravan, Quraysh decide to go, except Abū Lahab who pays a poor man to take his place, an action which definitely gives the implication of cowardice. Another man is shamed into accompanying the rest. As the party ready themselves to leave, they are reassured that the Banū Bakr, with whom they are at odds, will not harm them, but since the guarantee is given by Satan himself, it is obviously worthless. The contrast between these last akhbār and the earlier ones dealing with the Muslims could hardly be greater; the Muslims, united under

1) TT I, 1292-96.

Muhammad, are calm and put their belief in their leader, whereas the Meccans are divided among themselves, fearful of other tribes, and afraid for their caravan.

The next fourteen short akhbār are concerned with determining the number of Muslims who were with Muhammad at Badr.¹ The first is a general statement by al-Ṭabarī; the next five all give different numbers with no general agreement. The last seven all say that there were about 310 men or a number equal to those who passed Saul's test at the river, which the first khabar lists as 313. The fact that so many akhbār are used here and that over half of them agree indicates that al-Ṭabarī felt this to be an important point. The story of Saul's testing of his people is found in the Qur'ān, Sūra 2, 250-51; few men passed the test, but "Said those who reckoned they should meet God, 'How often a little company has overcome a numerous company, by God's leave!'"² This is an obvious parallel to the Muslims being outnumbered by the Meccans, yet the smaller force defeated the larger. Thus, in this instance it would seem that the actual number of men means nothing and that it is the parallel between the two situations which is important. It is probable that these verses were meant to boost the Muslims' morale by drawing upon Jewish and Biblical history, and that the number of those who remained loyal to Saul was fixed in later tradition as

1) TT I, 1296-99.

2) A. J. Arberry trans., The Koran Interpreted I (London, 1955), 64.

the same number of those who followed Muḥammad simply to heighten the similarities between the two.

The next three akhbār, two from Ibn Ishāq and one from 'Abd Allāh b. Mas'ūd, deal with the Muslims' decision to go on after they have learned that the Meccans are coming out to meet the caravan.¹ The first two demonstrate the Muslims' belief and trust in both Muḥammad the man and Muḥammad the prophet. Again an incident from Biblical history is used, this time to show that the Muslims do not resemble those who refused to fight with Moses.² The third khabar tells of the reassurance given to Muḥammad by the Anṣār that they will fight with him, even though they had earlier indicated that they would only help him when he was within their territory. Their spokesman, Sa'd b. Mu'adh, speaks of their devotion and belief in the Prophet; the reader gets the feeling that Sa'd is trying to outdo al-Miqdād and to show that the Anṣār are just as trustworthy, if not more so, than the Muhājirūn. These akhbār also show Muḥammad rather in the role of a tribal shaykh, consulting his followers for plans rather than ordering them to continue.

The akhbār then relate the events leading up to the actual battle.³ Muḥammad sends out scouts, who capture two water boys of Quraysh. This corresponds to the earlier account of how Muḥammad deduced the number of Quraysh; both accounts are given from 'Urwa b. al-Zubayr but through different lines

1) TT I, 1299-1302.

2) Sūra 5, 27.

3) TT I, 1302-10.

of transmission, which seem to be equally sound, and both agree in substance with only a few minor details differing. The account continues with the story of Juhaym's vision; as with 'Ātika's vision related earlier, it foretells disaster for Quraysh and also meets with scorn from Abū Jahl. When Abū Sufyān sends word that he has taken a different route to avoid the Muslims, it is Abū Jahl who insists on Quraysh continuing to Badr, impressing the other tribes in the area with a show of force; but al-Akhnas dismisses the Banū Zuhra, his allies, saying that although Abū Jahl does not seem to think so, Quraysh are certainly headed for disaster and there is no reason why they should be included in it. Ṭālib b. Abī Ṭālib also returns to Mecca, but he was excused from fighting by some of Quraysh because they knew that he would have preferred to have been with Muḥammad. Perhaps there is an indication here that not all the Quraysh were as bad as they seem to have been painted. The last two akhbār, both from Ibn Ishāq, deal with the tactics of Muḥammad in preparing for the battle; he chooses hard ground for his troops, whereas Quraysh are mired down in mud due to the rain which God has sent. Then al-Ḥubāb b. al-Mundhir persuades the Prophet that the best plan would be to stop up all the wells except one, which the Muslims would use, and to make their stand at this well as Quraysh would have to attack them to get water.

There follows a lengthy description of the battle, told in short akhbār and generally dealing with individuals and the people they fought.¹ The courage of the Muslims is the

1) TT I, 1310-29.

keynote of this section, each khābar stressing how they advanced against a larger force without fear since they had been promised Paradise if they should be killed. Quraysh are sometimes portrayed as brave, such as Abū al-Bakhtarī when he refuses to leave a friend and both are killed, although the Prophet had given orders that he was to be spared; but there are also stories that imply that some Quraysh were cowardly, as when Umayya b. Khalaf persuades his former friend 'Abd al-Rahmān b. 'Awf to take him prisoner rather than continue to fight. The account of the battle is fragmentary and often includes much background material telling of personal enmities; thus the reader gains no overall picture but is struck by the colourful details of individual combats. The account of the battle closes with four akhbār which describe the miraculous happenings and the intervention of the angels during the fighting; they are obviously placed here to stress the fact that the Muslims were aided by God and his minions, whereas the Meccans could rely only on mortal aid.

After the battle, Muḥammad turns his attention towards the dead.¹ He orders a search to be made for Abū Jahl, and when 'Abd Allāh b. Mas'ūd brings his head to him, the Prophet can only exclaim, "Praise be to God!" Then he orders the dead of Quraysh to be thrown into a pit and addresses them, saying that his god has kept his promise whereas the Meccans' god has obviously failed to help them. These two stories seem to give a picture of Muḥammad as a vengeful, boasting man, although they also stress that he no longer doubts his

1) TT I, 1329-33.

mission and has placed his trust in God. It should also be noted that this second story is given in two akhbār, the first from 'Ā'ishā, the second from Anas b. Mālik, and both through Ibn Ishāq; as 'Ā'ishā was not present at the time, her account is apparently an attack on others' renderings, notably that of Mūsā b. 'Uqba, as Guillaume has pointed out.¹ The complexity of Muḥammad's personality is demonstrated by the following khabar in which he speaks kindly to Abū Ḥudhayfa b. 'Utba b. Rabī'a, a Muslim, whose father's body is disposed of with his Meccan companions.

Two short akhbār deal with the dividing of booty among the Muslims and the revelation of Sūra 8, al-Anfāl.² Al-Ṭabarī obviously felt that he had already dealt with the sūra in sufficient detail in the Tafsīr and that there was no need to repeat any of the material here.³

The Prophet then returned to Medina with those of Quraysh who had been taken captive.⁴ Two of the captives were killed before reaching Medina and Muḥammad's inflexible attitude towards the Meccans is clearly shown when 'Uqba b. Abī Mu'ayt, before being killed, asks Muḥammad who will care for his children; Muḥammad answers, "Hell". Again, this khabar is followed by one which emphasizes Muḥammad's generosity and kindness. A third khabar tells how Muḥammad rebuked

1) Guillaume, op. cit., 305, fn. 2.

2) TT I, 1333-34.

3) Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī, op. cit., XIII, 361-581; XIV, 7-91.

4) TT I, 1334-38.

his wife Sawda for her sympathy toward his prisoner Abū Yazīd. The effect of these three accounts is to provide a picture of a just and stern man who will not hesitate to condemn even his own family in the way of truth. A short khobar ends this section and tells how a man whose full brother was taken prisoner has cut his family ties to the extent that he can speak of them as if they were not related. The captive brother tells of the contempt the Muslims felt for their captives, refusing to eat bread which they had touched.

The news of the disaster is taken to Mecca and the next khobar tells of how angry Abū Lahab became on hearing of it.¹ Abū Rāfi', the narrator, implies that Abū Lahab's death was the result of his striking a Muslim, the last in a series of cruelties to the Muslims. The two akhbār immediately following deal with al-'Abbās, whom Abū Rāfi' in the preceding account refers to as a crypto-Muslim; the first khobar says that Muḥammad was very uneasy about al-'Abbās being held captive, perhaps because he felt that he was a Muslim, and in the second Muḥammad credits an angel with his capture, implying that no mortal was capable of it alone. In the middle of the next section dealing with the ransoming of the captives, Muḥammad refuses to free al-'Abbās without ransom, saying that he has, to all appearances, been against the Muslims; when al-'Abbās protests that he has no money, the Prophet reveals that he knows of a secret horde which al-'Abbās left in Mecca, whereupon al-'Abbās proclaims himself

1) TT I, 1338-41.

to be a true Muslim.¹ Ibn Hishām's edition of Ibn Ishāq does not mention these occurrences, and they seem to be a later attempt to modify the fact that the ancestor of the 'Abbāsīd caliphs fought against Muḥammad at Badr.

The next long section concerns the ransoming of the captives.² Several stories are told concerning various individuals and the ways in which they were ransomed, including the Prophet's son-in-law Abū al-'Āṣ b. al-Rabī'. Muḥammad is ashamed when Zaynab sends her necklace as payment for her husband, and releases him without ransom; the khābar goes on to say that Zaynab went to Medina to join her father and Abū al-'Āṣ later joined her and became a Muslim. The account gives the impression that Muḥammad tried to deal justly with all people but rather failed to do so with Abū al-'Āṣ because he was a generous and kind man who had refused to divorce Zaynab before his conversion, despite the threats and persuasion of Quraysh.

The next khābar deals with 'Umayr b. Wahb's decision to kill Muḥammad, and his conversion to Islam after Muḥammad tells him of his conversation with Ṣafwān b. Umayya, during which he had determined to kill the Prophet.³ This khābar is very similar to the earlier one concerning al-'Abbās's conversion, emphasizing Muḥammad's knowledge of things which have happened hundreds of miles away and thus implying that he has learned them from God

1) TT I, 1344-45.

2) TT I, 1342-52.

2) TT I, 1352-54.

The following two akhbār deal with the discussion between Muḥammad and his followers on what to do with the captives.¹ Both accounts agree in general, with differing details. The first, from 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb through 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abbās, is rather plain, whereas the second, from 'Abd Allāh b. Mas'ūd, is longer and more appealing, with several quotes from the Qur'ān used by Muḥammad to illustrate the advice given him by Abū Bakr and 'Umar. Both akhbār are actually the background to the revelation of several verses of Sūra 8 which gave approval to the Prophet for ransoming his captives rather than killing them. A short khabar which follows also deals with these verses.

The last section details the number of Muslims who were present at Badr, the number who were killed, and the names of those who did not actually fight but were given part of the booty as a reward for duties which Muḥammad had given them. The last khabar gives a few small details of Muḥammad's actions during and after the battle.²

The first thing to note about the section on Badr is al-Ṭabarī's heavy reliance on the Sīra of Ibn Ishāq, which obviously indicates that by al-Ṭabarī's time this work was considered the authority on the Prophet's life. In contrast al-Ṭabarī uses al-Wāqidī as a secondary source, quoting him mainly for details which disagree with or are not found in Ibn Ishāq. A comparison with the account of Badr as given

1) TT I, 1354-57.

2) TT I, 1357-59.

in the Tafsīr shows that al-Ṭabarī, while using some of the akhbār which are also found in the Ta'rīkh, relied much less on Ibn Ishāq for material concerning Sūra 8. The obvious conclusion is that al-Ṭabarī regarded Ibn Ishāq as an historical authority but found him less trustworthy in theological and legal matters. Also to be noted is the fact that al-Ṭabarī does not include the great majority of poetry which is found in Ibn Hishām's edition of Ibn Ishāq; it may be that al-Ṭabarī heard the text from Salama b. al-Faḍl without much poetry, or perhaps he felt that poetry was rather out of place in dealing with the Prophet and that Qur'ānic references were more seemly. What little poetry is quoted is generally uttered by the Meccans.

The accounts of the battle of Badr found in Ibn Hishām's recension of Ibn Ishāq and in al-Wāqidī are generally quite similar to that of the Ta'rīkh.¹ The most notable difference is that al-Ṭabarī has included the akhbār which deal with al-'Abbās' capture at Badr and which state that he had already become a Muslim, but had not declared this for fear of the Meccans; neither Ibn Hishām nor al-Wāqidī even mention that al-'Abbās was present at the battle. It would thus seem that al-Ṭabarī used the recension of Ibn Ishāq by Salama b. al-Faḍl because it included the information on al-'Abbās. Furthermore, although al-Ṭabarī was familiar with at least three, and possibly four, other recensions of this work, that of

1) Ibn Hishām, Das Leben Muhammeds I (ed. F. Wüstenfeld, Göttingen, 1858), 427-539; al-Wāqidī, op. cit., I, 19-172.

Salama b. al-Faḍl is the most frequently cited, and the others are used for adding details.¹ We will see this happen again and again throughout the Ta'rīkh: the reliance on one source to follow the story, others being used mainly for corroboration or correction; by this method, al-Ṭabarī achieves continuity throughout one section, while at the same time he demonstrates his familiarity with a great many sources.

If we grant that Ibn Ishāq himself did not mention al-'Abbās' capture at Badr, then we must assume that it was added by some person transmitting the Sīra. Al-Ṭabarī himself

- 1) Cf. Guillaume, op. cit., xxxiii, who says that al-Ṭabarī was familiar with the recensions of Yūnus b. Bukayr, Yaḥyā b. Sa'īd al-Umawī, Hārūn b. Abī 'Īsā and Salama b. al-Faḍl. Due to the fact that Hārūn b. Abī 'Īsā does not seem to be mentioned anywhere in the Ta'rīkh and that 'Alī b. Mujāhid's recension is used (TT I, 1145, 1253, 1511, etc), it would appear that the numbers by which Guillaume refers to the various recensions have been confused. It is also possible that al-Ṭabarī may have used a recension not mentioned by Guillaume, that of Ibn 'Ulayya (TT I, 1191). Guillaume also remarks that the recension of Yūnus b. Bukayr is the most frequently used; unless al-Ṭabarī gives it with an isnād that does not include Yūnus as a transmitter - which is highly unlikely - , then we must assert that Salama b. al-Faḍl's recension is used far more frequently than any other.

could not have added it, since al-Ya'qūbī mentions it¹; therefore, we are left with assuming that either Salama b. al-Faḍl or Ibn Ḥumayd added it. Although little is known of Salama's life, it is possible that he was a pro-'Abbāsīd scholar and used these akhbār as a means of legitimizing 'Abbāsīd claims to the caliphate. He himself may have actually seen the revolution which put the 'Abbāsīd family in power and he certainly lived in the period when the 'Abbāsīd propaganda machine was well-organized and effective. Ibn Ḥajar says that Salama was a Shī'ite.² It is much more probable that this should be interpreted as pro-'Abbāsīd; the various proto-Shī'ite groups were active in the movement which led to the 'Abbāsīd revolution, and later authors such as Ibn Ḥajar may have been unable, or unwilling, to distinguish between the various elements. At any rate, it would be much more likely that Salama would suppress any evidence of al-'Abbās' presence at Badr, if he were a Shī'ite. Although the account would have some value to the Shī'a by demonstrating that the ancestor of the 'Abbāsīd caliphs converted to Islam after 'Alī, it was generally recognized that 'Alī was one of the very first, if not the first, convert after Khadija, and thus fabricating a story about al-'Abbās could only serve to emphasize 'Alī's primacy in Islam in a very minor way. Moreover, Abū Sufyān became a Muslim at an even later date, but his direct descendants had served as caliphs for nearly ninety

1) Yqbi II, 38-39.

2) IHjr IV, 153-54.

years. While al-Ṭabarī certainly showed prudence in including this information about al-‘Abbās, living as he was under an ‘Abbāsīd regime, perhaps it is more to the point to say that he may have felt its value to lie in showing that whether one's ancestor were the first Muslim or not, the fact was that all of Quraysh eventually converted. Islam was inevitable, and even the most resolute opposition to it succumbed, either suddenly or gradually, to the ordained order which it betokened. Perhaps, too, al-Ṭabarī felt that the facts of history supported this line of thought; an early conversion had not necessarily ensured one's descendants a place of power in society, as ‘Alī's had certainly not put his family in power. It would seem, then, that to al-Ṭabarī the important factor was the conversion of Muḥammad's early opponents to Islam and the absorption of these later converts into the umma which he had originally founded in Medina.

The picture of Muḥammad which one receives from this account is a complex one. Although at first glance Muḥammad appears to be seeking revenge for all the cruelty and slights which the Meccans had heaped upon him, at second reading one begins to feel that Muḥammad's repeatedly imploring God to strike his enemies dead arises out of a sense of insecurity rather than vengeance. Before the battle, Muḥammad realises his position is precarious and knows that a victory against the Meccans will both consolidate his position and boost the morale of the Muslims. This theory becomes even more tenable as one reads farther, when after the battle Muḥammad grows more confident, in his speech to the Meccan dead, in his

rejoicing at Abū Jahl's death, in his dealing with the captives. Perhaps al-Ṭabarī felt that this picture of Muḥammad emphasized his mortal qualities, his doubts and fears, which could so easily have been forgotten in the three intervening centuries. To al-Ṭabarī, Muḥammad must have represented the ideal man - and despite the fact of his prophethood it is his common humanity that was emphasized both by himself and by the Qur'ān; therefore, those of his qualities which al-Ṭabarī chose to record would have seemed to be in no way discordant with the presumed perfection. It is the very human qualities shown by Muḥammad, his doubts, his fears, his uncertainties, that invest him with a personality recognizable to all, while his wisdom and courage elevate this personality to the proper heroic level. To al-Ṭabarī there was in this an example for the people of his own time, divided as they were by religious, legal and political problems; as the prophet of their religion felt the same human emotions as they, there should be no shame in their fears and hesitations, but encouragement to put their trust in God and His revealed word as Muḥammad had. Just as he had overcome opposition and founded the umma of which theirs was the direct descendant, so too might they someday overcome the problems besetting that umma and return to the perfect society which God has intended for them.

The great number of dates and people mentioned is also significant. Again and again one finds names of men and a discussion of the exact date repeated throughout the Ta'rīkh. While this pre-occupation with the chronological sequence of events might permit the assumption that some notion of historical

causality was present in the mind of the chronicler, yet, in fact, such a conception of history cannot usually be demonstrated in al-Ṭabarī or indeed in any of his predecessors or contemporaries. Each incident is presented in isolation with little indication of an awareness of the implications it might have on future events, nor is any effort made to show it as a consistent development from what preceded. The attention paid to details of dates and the identification of individuals in an action or situation seems mainly to have arisen out of the historian's concern for a technique of verification rather than accuracy as to historical significance. Whereas the Western historians mentioned earlier have each felt the need to relate an event such as the battle of Badr to a total conception of the early development of the Islamic state, explaining its importance in the light of the future course taken by affairs in Medina, to a Muslim of the third century for whom this state had become the only conceivable social and political order there would be no awareness even that it was susceptible of interpretation; rather it was but one more milestone on the path towards the achievement of the good society intended by God. To dwell on such incidents must have seemed to minds such as al-Ṭabarī's simply a means of observing the way in which God works to effect His will, and as God Himself is unknowable and His motives beyond understanding, so too was it no part of the duty of the historian to pretend to such insights. Although this attitude might contribute towards a certain randomness in the presentation of the events of past ages, it would be wholly wrong to assume that historians

regarded these as accidental or fortuitous; each one of them had meaning which was ultimately known to God alone and even the most trivial thereby gain a significance not immediately apparent to the human understanding.

Although this sense of divine intention is implicit in all that the historian has to record there does, nevertheless, exist a wish on his part to make his narrative intelligible in human terms, and this is done most frequently by reducing the origins of a series of events to some familiar motivation which would be readily understood by all who would read it. The anecdotal nature of early Islamic historical works can be seen to have arisen partly out of this desire to make the events more personal, more readily identifiable to people whose experiences of such events was extremely limited. Thus in the description of Badr, we find the battle reduced to a series of personal combats, reminiscent of pre-Islamic literature, glorifying individuals rather than tribes and always listing the names of men who took part. As genealogy had long been a pre-occupation of the Arabs, it is quite natural that men should be identified to the fourth or fifth generation and that the full name quite often be repeated. Furthermore, it should be remembered that most of the material was collected by Ibn Ishāq well over a century after the battle and that having an ancestor named as having fought with the Prophet at Badr could have conferred honour upon his descendants; thus the problem of al-'Abbās having fought for the Meccans could be resolved by presenting him as being a secret Muslim.

Within recent memory the controversies of the Shu'ūbiyya had polarized the Muslim society of the great urban centres, especially in the East, into two incompatible elements, the early (Arab) Muslims and the neo-Muslims. It was to be expected that claims to nobility and social pre-eminence would have expressed itself amongst the conservative Arab element by a reiterated insistence on the ancestry of the individuals who would be in a position of leadership. It cannot be accidental that works such as that of Ibn Ishāq are so detailed and particular in the matter of the names or the individuals involved in the early triumphs of Islam, nor would al-Ṭabarī's adherence to this same practice have seemed otiose or cumbersome to that class which would have recourse to works such as his in order to vindicate their own claims to authority or, at least, respect. Al-Ṭabarī himself would have undoubtedly known many people who claimed descent from such men, and may have chosen certain akhbār to show that some of his contemporaries were entitled to an honoured place in society because their ancestors were pre-eminent in the early umma.

Ṣiffīn

The confrontation between 'Alī and Mu'āwiya at Ṣiffīn was one of a series of events in the conflict between the two, which was only resolved by 'Alī's assassination three years later. In one sense, this incident and the arbitration which followed represent the culmination of the conflict, since 'Alī's very acceptance of the idea of arbitration compromised

his position vis-à-vis his supporters to such an extent that he was actually forced into open war with that group known as the Khawārij and lost a good deal of his initial popularity among the other factions which had originally supported him. Furthermore, the conflict with Mu'āwiya is generally seen as one of the elements which led to the formation of a movement favouring the claims of 'Alī and his descendants over other members of the ahl al-bayt and which at a later date would crystallize into the sects known generically as the Shī'a.

Because this conflict is generally seen in terms of the personalities involved and the claims put forward on their behalf by later supporters, the historical accounts of these events are very confused and tend to be biased in favour of one of the protagonists. Some of our earliest sources, such as Abū Mikhnaf, have not survived independently and can only be studied through the pieces which later writers such as al-Ṭabarī saw fit to reproduce. Naṣr b. Muzāḥim's Waq'at Ṣiffīn, although undoubtedly belonging to the 'Alid tradition, is valuable in that it is one of the earliest monographs of its type to survive independently and thus gives us a touchstone with which to compare other accounts.¹

Many secondary sources have also tended to prejudice

1) Waq'at Ṣiffīn (ed. 'Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn, Cairo, 1365 A.H.). For accounts of the author, see Khtb XIII, 282-83; IN, 93; Yqt, 210-11; GAL SI, 214; Sezgin, 313.

in favour of either 'Alī or Mu'āwiya, depending largely on which primary sources the authors used. Muir depicts 'Alī as hesitating and procrastinating, content to allow matters to run their course without his having to intervene; both 'Alī and Mu'āwiya are condemned for having allowed their youthful vigour to be dissipated by luxury.¹ Wellhausen saw 'Alī as the aggressor, and felt that Mu'āwiya was only attempting to protect his position in Syria and to gain control of Egypt; he prefers to regard al-Ashtar as the real hero of Ṣiffīn, "a genuine Arab nobleman as opposed to the pious bigots and the lukewarm or cunning politicians", and believes that his rightful place in the history of these events was suppressed by later authors in favour of 'Alī.² Shaban has attempted to compromise between the two extremes, stating that Mu'āwiya had some justification for wishing to avenge 'Uṭhmān's murder, but allowing that 'Alī's force of character was sufficient to bring about the coalition of diverse interests which initially supported him; he feels that the basic issue of the entire conflict between the two was the relationship between Syria and Iraq, and that the arbitration was an attempt to delineate this relationship.³

The account of the fighting at Ṣiffīn and the arbitration

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- 1) Muir, The Caliphate, op. cit., 245-50, 264-82.
 - 2) Wellhausen, The Arab Kingdom, op. cit., 75-93; on al-Ashtar, see 81-82.
 - 3) Shaban, Islamic History A.D. 600-750 (A.H. 132), op. cit., 72-77.

is very long and extremely confusing; the first part of this section, dealing with the fighting until the moment when the Syrians raise Qur'āns and summon 'Alī and his supporters to arbitration, is indeed so confusing that one feels that the authorities who transmitted the material reported the incidents in such a haphazard way because they themselves could not bring any order into it.¹ Wellhausen has noted that, although the names of the participants vary, the similarity of presentation makes it probable that the battles reported at the beginning are actually the same as those presented as happening after the truce during Muharrām;² this is certainly a very appealing theory, although it would mean that at some point in the transmission of the material the chronology must have been deliberately tampered with. However, these akhbār can be dealt with as a whole and several generalizations may be made about them. The reports are written in a style reminiscent of the ayyām literature, celebrating the exploits of individuals and clans in both prose and verse; indeed each khābar is very much like the next with only the names changed. Each khābar usually begins with an individual exhorting his men to fight for God, the Faith, and truth, quoting a verse or two from the Qur'ān to demonstrate that right is on their side.

Ibn Budayl stood among his men and said, "Mu'āwiya has claimed for his people what they are not, and

1) TT I, 3256-3329.

2) Wellhausen, The Arab Kingdom, op. cit., 79.

the man who is unlike him has contested this matter. They 'dispute with falsehood, that they might rebut thereby the Truth'. [18:54; 40:5] He has assaulted you with nomadic Arabs and groups whom he had adorned with falsehood, in whose hearts he has sown the seeds of fitna, and whom he has confused concerning this matter. 'It has increased in abomination added to their abomination.' [9:126] You have from your Lord a light and a clear proof. Fight the impious rebels, do not fear them! Why do you fear them, when in your hands is the Book of God, pure and holy? 'Are you afraid of them? You would do better to be afraid of God, if you are a believer. Fight them, and God will chastise them at your hands and degrade them, and He will help you against them, and bring healing to the breasts of a people who believe.' [9:13-14] We will fight them, first with the Prophet, and secondly with this; for, by God! they do not fear Him, nor are they righteous or rightly guided, but only rise to be your enemies. May God bless you!" He and his men fought violently.¹

The second part of this account involves the summons to arbitration by the Syrians, the appointing of an arbitrator by each side, the change of opinion by the Khawārij, the meeting of the arbitrators, and the final break of the Khawārij with 'Alī.² This section is not nearly so confused

1) TT I, 3289-90.

2) TT I, 3329-63.

as the first, although one still meets with a good deal of recapitulation and chronological confusion.¹

Al-Ṭabarī relies almost exclusively on Abū Mikhnaf for the whole of this account, and although it is rather difficult to decide by the isnāds given in the Ta'rīkh, it seems quite probable that he uses Abū Mikhnaf through Hishām b. Muḥammad al-Kalbī.² We can say undoubtedly that al-Ṭabarī has thus given the account from an Iraqi point of view; but because there is little known about Abū Mikhnaf's life, and since he is so often identified with the Shī'ite historical tradition, it is worth investigating the matter a bit further.

Petersen, in his monograph on the historiography of the 'Alī-Mu'āwiya conflict, states that there is no reason to believe in Abū Mikhnaf's chronology. He bases this on various events, including Abū Mikhnaf's omission of 'Alī's sending of Jarīr b. 'Abd Allāh to Mu'āwiya to attempt a reconciliation between the two.³ However, it seems that

1) For example, TT I, 3341-43; this khābar from al-Zuhrī is simply a very short resume of the entire conflict at Ṣiffīn, 'Alī's acceptance of the arbitration, and the meeting of the arbitrators. It is quite out of place here, and serves to interrupt the reader's already tenuous grasp of matters. One suspects that the subject was so vast, the akhbār so numerous, that al-Ṭabarī himself lost sight of any order which he may have been trying to introduce into the subject.

2) Ursula Sezgin, op. cit.; 40-41, 43-44.

3) Petersen, 55-57.

Petersen has missed the fact that Naṣr b. Muzāḥim uses Abū Mikhnaf as a source through 'Umar b. Sa'd (or 'Umar b. Sa'id), who very rarely mentions Abū Mikhnaf by name; a direct comparison of the akhbār and isnāds in the Ta'rīkh has established this beyond doubt.¹ Naṣr b. Muzāḥim, moreover, does include the khabar about Jarīr b. 'Abd Allāh, with an isnād that indicates that the material came from Abū Mikhnaf through 'Umar b. Sa'd.²

Bearing in mind, then, that Abū Mikhnaf is used consistently throughout Naṣr's work without being named, let us now examine a case in which the date has apparently been deliberately changed. Al-Ṭabarī gives an account on the authority of Abū Mikhnaf of 'Alī sending a députation to Mu'āwiya to persuade him to make peace; the khabar clearly states in two places that this was in Dhū al-Ḥijja, i.e. after both armies had reached Ṣiffīn and engaged in fighting.³ The very same account appears in Naṣr b. Muzāḥim, on the authority

1) Petersen, 101-08; Ursula Sezgin, op. cit., 47-48, 104-05 (which lists the corresponding passages in the Ta'rīkh and Waq'at Ṣiffīn), 137-39; see also Sezgin, 311. Al-Ṭūsī, al-Fihrist (ed. A. Sprenger/new ed. Maḥmūd Ramyār, Maṣḥad, 1351 A.H.S.), 148, says that 'Umar b. Sa'id transmitted material on the authority of Abū Mikhnaf. The differences in his name (Sa'd/Sa'id) are apparently a copyist's error; there seems to be no doubt that both names refer to the same person.

2) Naṣr b. Muzāḥim, op. cit., 32.

3) TT I, 3270, 3272.

of 'Umar b. Sa'd, in approximately the same place in the proceedings, worded almost identically to the account in the Ta'rīkh, with one major exception - the date is given as Rabī' II, eight months earlier.¹ The khābar itself is rather curious; the names of 'Alī's envoys have not been previously mentioned and the only thing which places it in this position at all is the date given in the Ta'rīkh. Elsewhere, Abū Mikhnaf has dated the breach between 'Alī and Mu'āwiya to shortly after 'Alī's election as caliph.² If we accept this, then it could be that this khābar represents an earlier attempt by 'Alī to make peace with Mu'āwiya, which the date in Naṣr b. Muzāḥim would bear out. There remains, of course, the problem of why this khābar should then appear in the account of the hostilities at Ṣiffīn; the report must have been misplaced very early, as Naṣr b. Muzāḥim died less than sixty years after Abū Mikhnaf. The key to this may be the fact that in the Waq'at Ṣiffīn this report begins with a few lines that are missing in the Ta'rīkh; moreover, the first few words in Naṣr b. Muzāḥim are identical to those with which al-Ṭabarī begins his khābar and which are then repeated in the former. It would thus be easy for a copyist who knew little of the subject to confuse the two incidents and place them together.

If we accept this supposition, then it follows that someone, most probably either Hishām b. al-Kalbī or al-Ṭabarī,

1) Naṣr b. Muzāḥim, op. cit., 209, 211.

2) Petersen, 56.

changed the date to Dhū al-Ḥijja in order to make the khobar fit chronologically in this place. Certainly, al-Ṭabarī has strong motives for using a khobar with this date in it. Just previous to the section on the preparations for 'Alī's march to Ṣiffīn, al-Ṭabarī implies solely by the placement of al-Madā'inī's khobar that the breach between 'Alī and Mu'āwiya took place after the battle of the Camel.¹ Therefore, the report about negotiations taking place must be dated to Dhū al-Ḥijja if he is to adhere to this chronology. Likewise, the story of Mu'āwiya receiving 'Uṭhmān's bloody shirt and Nā'ila's fingers, which is found in other sources, could not possibly be included in the Ta'rīkh because it would wreck al-Ṭabarī's carefully planned system of dates.²

Having shown that al-Ṭabarī is thus committed to a very late date for the breach, we must attempt to formulate some possible answers as to why he is so emphatic on this point. First, the late breach gives the impression that Mu'āwiya was biding his time for some reason; if he were truly interested only in avenging 'Uṭhmān's murder, it would seem more logical to declare his intentions right away, as other sources have him doing. On the otherhand, shortly after 'Alī's election as caliph it was clear that trouble was being stirred up in Medina by 'Ā'isha, who was later joined by Ṭalha and al-Zubayr; as far as Mu'āwiya was concerned, these latter two were as involved in 'Uṭhmān's murder as much as 'Alī. It would therefore

1) TT I, 3255-56.

2) Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, op. cit., XV, 71-72.

be advantageous for Mu'āwīya to wait for the outcome of whatever conflict might arise; at the worst, if the two factions did come to an amicable agreement and present a united front against him, he was secure in his own province and had the support and military strength to withstand any attack made by them. Still, by adhering to this late date, al-Ṭabarī does leave open the possibility that Mu'āwīya cherished designs, at the very least, on more power for himself, if not the caliphate; certainly, in the akhbār which al-Ṭabarī has chosen to record, 'Alī's supporters refer to the Syrians as rebels.

However, it can also be demonstrated that there is very little in this section which can be construed as condemnatory of Mu'āwīya as leading a rebellion. There is a remarkable lack of personal invective between the two main protagonists; after the failure of the arbitration meeting, 'Alī and Mu'āwīya curse each other at the public prayers, and at one early point, 'Alī remarks that both Mu'āwīya and his father were very unwilling converts to Islam and had been trying to undermine it ever since.¹ In fact, to all intents and purposes,

1) TT I, 3360, 3278-79. Petersen, 59-61, builds upon this identification of Mu'āwīya and his father with pre-Islamic paganism to show that Abū Mikhnaf thus condemned the Umayyad caliphate as illegal. However, it seems plain from the accounts in the Ta'rīkh that Abū Mikhnaf apports the blame for the Syrian success of the arbitration squarely on 'Amr b. al-'Āṣ, and faults Mu'āwīya mainly for agreeing with his adviser. It would seem much more likely that Abū/

Mu'āwiya is very much a secondary figure in this account; the villain is quite clearly 'Amr b. al-'Āṣ. It is he who devises the strategem whereby 'Alī is forced to accept the Syrian call to arbitration, and is credited with knowing that this summons would divide 'Alī's supporters; he objects to 'Alī being named as the Amīr al-Mu'minīn in the arbitration agreement and insists that it be erased; and finally, he betrays his word to Abū Mūsā at the arbitration meeting and proclaims Mu'āwiya the rightful heir to 'Uthmān.¹ Thus, to a certain extent, we find that Mu'āwiya's character is protected by allowing 'Amr to assume the role of instigator; and while this can hardly be seen as a vindication of the Umayyads and their claim to the caliphate, it can serve the purpose of removing from the character of a future caliph, and thus from the very office of the caliphate, the very damaging stigma of having fomented rebellion against a caliph. If al-Ṭabarī admitted that for ninety years the caliphate was occupied by usurpers, then he would also have to show that a large proportion of the umma - that umma founded by Muḥammad and inspired by God - had not only accepted the situation but had to some extent actually connived in the continued occupation of the office by a dynasty which had no right to

cont'd:- Abū Mikhnaf would be more willing to see Mu'āwiya as the deviser of the arbitration scheme and to downplay 'Amr's role if he truly held anti-Umayyad sentiments.

1) TT I, 3329, 3334-35, 3354-59.

be there in the first place. This would mean a complete breakdown of the laws set forth for the community not only by Muḥammad but by the Qur'ān itself, in other words, God, a totally untenable position for a man of al-Ṭabarī's background and politico-religious inclinations.

Al-Ṭabarī's account of Ṣiffīn and the arbitration is more concerned with 'Alī and his supporters than with the Syrians. While 'Alī is pictured as of good character, there are no extreme claims made on his behalf. Thus, he does not quibble over having his name substituted for his title on the arbitration document, citing as his example the Prophet's concession on this point at Ḥudaybiyya; he is very magnanimous, releasing the captives taken at Ṣiffīn; on his way back from Ṣiffīn he consults the equivalent of the man in the street to find out what the common people think of his agreeing to the arbitration; and he attempts to reconcile the Khawārij until he is forced to take up arms against them.¹ Perhaps the most extreme claim is his defense for agreeing to the arbitration; in one place he says that he feared that his sons, the Prophet's grandsons, would be killed if the fighting continued, and he could not take the responsibility for allowing the Prophet's seed to be destroyed.² This must, of course, be seen as a later formulation to defend 'Alī's position vis-à-vis the arbitration. On the whole al-Ṭabarī's treatment of 'Alī is very sympathetic without verging on the

1) TT I, 3334-35, 3339-40, 3345-49, 3349-54, 3360-63.

2) TT I, 3346-47.

fanatical or grotesque. Quite apart from the question of 'Alī's special position in Islam because of his relationship to Muḥammad, al-Ṭabarī would have an especial interest in 'Alī because he was caliph, and it was his credibility as leader of the umma which was at stake in this conflict. The umma was always of foremost interest to al-Ṭabarī, and thus the man who was elected as its leader was to be regarded as of greatest significance, since he (theoretically) guided the umma in the path set down for it by God and His prophet.

As regards the Khawārij, without a special study of the incidents following Ṣiffīn, it is rather difficult to formulate al-Ṭabarī's attitude towards them. In the first place, he has not adequately explained why the very faction which forced 'Alī to accept the Syrian's offer to arbitrate, should later suddenly decide that arbitration was untenable. A partial explanation may be found in 'Alī's persuading them to return with him to Kufa after their first secession.¹ When he reassures them that the arbitrators will decide the matter only through the use of the Qur'ān, they seem to be mollified. However, this presupposes either that the terms of the arbitration agreement were not generally known, which is rather unlikely², or that the Khawārij were expecting some sort of deceit on 'Amr b. al-'Āṣ' part. Either way, the link is only tenuous at best. However, it can hardly be supposed

1) TT I, 3349-54.

2) TT I, 3338-39, gives the impression that the document was read out to 'Alī's troops.

that al-Ṭabarī would be favourably disposed to the Khawārij, the very name having by his time become synonymous with "rebel", "insurgent", or any regional group in open conflict with the central authority. Within his own lifetime, the Zanj rebellion had devastated southern Iraq. While the Khawārij of his own time had little in common with that of 'Alī's time, this would still have left an indelible mark on al-Ṭabarī's mind, and he could hardly have been able to dissociate entirely these later Khawārij from the very early ones.

Petersen has characterized al-Ṭabarī as anti-Umayyad, pro-'Abbāsīd and moderately Shī'ite. As we have mentioned above, it would seem rather difficult to call al-Ṭabarī anti-Umayyad, in the sense that he does not, indeed cannot, condemn the Umayyad caliphate as being illegal usurpation. Although the accounts in this section do not give 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abbās a predominating role, he is certainly seen as one of 'Alī's trusted advisers; he concedes to the arbitration only because 'Alī does, and later warns Abū Mūsā that 'Amr is not to be trusted.¹ So, in the sense that al-Ṭabarī does give him an honoured place beside 'Alī, we can say that al-Ṭabarī is pro-'Abbāsīd. However, al-Ṭabarī does not seem to adopt any Shī'ite views, no matter how moderate; his acceptance of 'Alī's character should not be seen as indicative of anything more than the veneration due one of the Rāshidūn. Although it is true that during al-Ṭabarī's lifetime the Ismā'īlī Shī'a were becoming more openly active, it can hardly be expected that a man of his background could bring himself to compromise

1) TT I, 3350-54, 3358.

with an extremist sect which he would view as heretics.¹

For al-Ṭabarī, the conflict between 'Alī and Mu'āwiya could easily have symbolized the problems and dangers which the umma had faced throughout the three centuries of its existence, and the chaos which resulted from allegiance to a man or cause. The three main factions which arose out of this conflict were at odds not only with one another, but also with the one element of society which in al-Ṭabarī's time represented the orthodox or mainstream in Islamic society; it would be very tempting for him to identify these factions with the elements that he himself knew: Mu'āwiya's party with the Ḥanbalites; the 'Alids with the various branches of the Shī'a active in the late second and early third century; and the original Khawārij with that element of his society which had adopted the name, if not necessarily the principles. All of these factions had resulted from their allegiance to an individual or a cause, and it may not be too far-fetched to say that al-Ṭabarī, with his rather conservative religio-political background and thorough grounding in the law, saw this type of belief as a danger to the unity of the umma because

1) Petersen, 149-58. Much of Petersen's view of al-Ṭabarī's attitudes has been predetermined by his view of Abū Mikhnaf; unfortunately, he speaks of the former as employing the latter as a "pure" source. As we mentioned earlier, al-Ṭabarī apparently used Abū Mikhnaf through the medium of Hishām b. al-Kalbī, which could make some difference to al-Ṭabarī's attitudes.

it relegated God, the Qur'ān, and the Prophet to secondary roles. Certainly all three of these factions were very active during his lifetime and had contributed to the devastation and division of the Islamic world. Perhaps, then, al-Ṭabarī saw the consequences of Ṣiffīn as being particularly relevant to his own time, as a parallel and warning to the umma that further disintegration and division could only bring it to the point where any sort of repair would be beyond its capabilities.

The caliphate of 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz

The short reign of 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz as caliph has long been seen, in both Muslim and Western historical tradition, as a unique phase in the history of the Umayyad dynasty. The stress laid upon his piety and religious motives, generally seen as arising in part from his pride in his descent from 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, has tended to obscure the relative value of his legal and financial reforms, which are usually ascribed to his desire to bring the empire back into line with the earliest Islamic community in the time of Muḥammad, Abū Bakr and 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb. The legends which grew up around 'Umar at an early stage and which stress his piety and concern for his subject's religious welfare exempted him from the condemnation to which historians in 'Abbāsīd times generally subjected the whole of the Umayyad family; furthermore, the fact that 'Umar's attempts at reform, whether resulting from religious or political motives or a combination of both, failed

due to the brevity of his reign and the reversion of the caliphate to the family of 'Abd al-Malik, coupled with the tales of his piety, may have contributed to the absence of harsh criticism by later writers.

This section will deal only with the caliphate of 'Umar as presented by al-Ṭabarī under that heading, and not with other aspects of 'Umar's life, such as his governorship of Medina or the problem of his character.¹ The annalistic organization of the Ta'rīkh prevented al-Ṭabarī from presenting any caliph's life as a continuous narrative, and the reports on his personality which are included at the end of his reign generally relate to the period of his caliphate. The overall effect is to divide the man's life into two parts, the one related without reference to the other. It is not improbable to say that al-Ṭabarī himself, while perhaps aware of this false dichotomy, saw the caliph as different from the earlier man due to his assumption of the office.

In addition to the account in the Ta'rīkh, there are two earlier sources to which al-Ṭabarī had access. The section on 'Umar in Ibn Sa'd's Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kabīr was used extensively by al-Ṭabarī.² 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abd al-Ḥakam's (d. 214) Sīrat 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz survives today in the

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- 1) The diverse reports of 'Umar's character are discussed in W. W. Barthold, "Caliph 'Umar II and the Conflicting Reports on his Personality", (trans. Jan W. Weryho), The Islamic Quarterly XV (1971), 69-95.
 - 2) Muḥammad b. Sa'd, Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kabīr (ed. E. Sachau et al., Leiden, 1905-40), 242-302.

recension of his son Muḥammad; although Muḥammad and two of his brothers are listed as al-Ṭabarī's teachers, the latter does not seem to have used this work at all.¹ One reason may be that Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam does not give individual isnāds, but lists his authorities all together at the beginning of the book; furthermore, this Sīra is not really a biography, but rather an account of 'Umar's legal and religious practices and attitudes. As we shall see, these are aspects of 'Umar's character upon which al-Ṭabarī barely touches.

The secondary source material on 'Umar is found scattered throughout works on the early history of Islam, with scholars such as von Kremer, Müller, and Muir more inclined to see 'Umar as an ineffectual ruler attempting to reform the empire on an out of date model through religious scruples.² C. H. Becker first attempted to discover what sort of man existed beneath the legends, and Julius Wellhausen, while still seeing 'Umar's reign as the high point of Umayyad times, discerned that 'Umar was not necessarily trying to return to the policies of 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, but to formulate a policy of conciliation

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- 1) 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abd al-Ḥakam, Sīrat 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz (ed. Aḥmad 'Ubayd, Cairo, 1346 A.H.).
 - 2) Alfred von Kremer, Culturgeschichte des Orients unter den Chalifen I (Wien, 1875), 174-79; August Müller, Der Islam im Morgen- und Abendland I (Berlin, 1885), 439-42; Sir William Muir, The Caliphate, Its Rise, Decline and Fall (second ed., revised, London, 1892), 376-81.

with disaffected groups.¹ H.A.R. Gibb made a study of 'Umar's financial reforms, as found in Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam's Sīra, which, together with Wellhausen's views, contributed towards M.A. Shaban's recent statements that 'Umar's attempt to assimilate all Muslims into one community was "realistic politics", but no less "radical" and "revolutionary".²

The account of 'Umar's caliphate in the Ta'rīkh begins with a long section on Sulaymān b. 'Abd al-Malik's death and the appointment of his cousin 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz as his successor.³ The entire section is one khābar and is related on the authority of Rajā' b. Ḥaywa through al-Wāqidī. Rajā' was a close friend and adviser to both Sulaymān and 'Umar, and it is clear from the text that Rajā' influenced Sulaymān to name 'Umar as the next caliph and that his prompt action after Sulaymān's death secured 'Umar's succession.⁴

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- 1) C.H. Becker, "Studien zur Omajjadengeschichte. A. 'Omar II", Zeitschrift für Assyriologie XV (1900), 1-36; Wellhausen, The Arab Kingdom and Its Fall, op. cit., 267-312.
 - 2) H.A.R. Gibb, "The Fiscal Rescript of 'Umar II", Arabica II (1955), 1-16; M.A. Shaban, The 'Abbāsīd Revolution (Cambridge, 1970), 86-92, and Islamic History A.D. 600-750 (A.H. 132), A New Interpretation (Cambridge, 1971), 127-37.
 - 3) TT II, 1340-45.
 - 4) On the role of Rajā' in early Islamic history, and especially on his actions during Sulaymān's death and 'Umar's succession, see C.E. Bosworth, "Rajā' b. Ḥaywa al-Kindī and the Umayyad Caliphs", Islamic Quarterly XVI (1972), 36-80.

Since Rajā' was in favour of 'Umar's accession, one would expect the account to be biased in his favour, and certainly one gains the impression of a good and pious man who was overcome with doubts when he heard that he was to be caliph; there is also, however, a faint hint that perhaps 'Umar was not so reluctant as he seemed. After Sulaymān had the document proclaiming his successor sealed and had his family and friends swear allegiance to the next caliph without being told his name, 'Umar approached Rajā' and asked who had been nominated; he feared that it might be he and stated that if this were so he wished to speak with Sulaymān and dissuade him from such an act. Rajā', realizing that the succession plans would be endangered if even one other person knew of them, refused to tell him, and 'Umar angrily went off. It would seem that if 'Umar suspected that he had been named as successor, his intention could have been to strengthen Sulaymān's (and Rajā''s) choice with a self-deprecating speech.¹ The khobar finishes with a short account of 'Abd al-'Azīz b. al-Wālīd's intention to revolt against 'Umar, which he immediately changed when he learned that 'Umar had been appointed by Sulaymān to be caliph and had not declared himself caliph; here again, 'Umar declares that he did not wish to be caliph and would gladly step aside, but there is the implication that 'Umar feels that since he was appointed, he will honour the confidence shown in him. The final statement in the khobar very skillfully implies that the

1) See also IS V, 249, where 'Umar's desire to be caliph seems to be stated even more clearly.

majority of people wanted Sulaymān to appoint 'Umar as successor, thereby not only not naming his own son, but also breaking the wish of his father 'Abd al-Mālik that Yazīd be the next caliph after Sulaymān.

The two following akhbār are statements of further events during the last part of the year 99; neither one has an isnād and should thus be taken as merely notices of incidents which had been dealt with in other works or were considered by al-Ṭabarī to be of little significance.¹ The first concerns 'Umar's recalling of Maslama and the Muslim army from the siege of Constantinople; although this abandoning of the war with Byzantium, and the consequent withdrawal of the frontier, was an important part of 'Umar's policy, al-Ṭabarī devotes only four lines to it, which clearly indicates that he felt it was not important enough to expand on.² However, this is immediately followed by another short khobar which reports a Turkish raid into Azerbaijan; coming immediately after as it does, it seems to imply that whereas 'Umar was quite willing to maintain static frontiers, he would not allow those frontiers to be breached and was prepared to send troops to deal with any force which violated Muslim lives and property.

The last three akhbār are statements of the kind generally found at the end of the reports of each year in the Ta'rīkh.³

1) TT II, 1346.

2) So also with 'Umar's withdrawal of troops and settlers from Transoxiana, TT II, 1365.

3) TT II, 1346-47.

They list the men who were 'āmils and qādīs of the central provinces and the man who led the hajj. The last khobar is given on the authority of al-Wāqidī, and while the first two have no isnād, they obviously come from two different sources as they reproduce some of the same material. While the three akhbār all agree on the details which they report, perhaps al-Ṭabarī felt that each khobar had to be reproduced in its entirety, rather than using only the parts which were not in the preceding khobar.

The report of the year 100 opens with an account of the Khārijite revolt in Iraq.¹ The first khobar is very short and gives the main outline of the affair; the second khobar, from Abū 'Ubayda, gives the details of the revolt, including 'Umar's attempts to settle the matter peacefully. The second account ends with the statement that 'Umar was poisoned by his Marwānid cousins, who feared that his talks with the Khārijites would influence him to remove Yazīd b. 'Abd al-Malik from the succession, as specified by Sulaymān, and that they would thus be removed from power. Since this is not mentioned by any other authority, it would seem that this is an attempt to further blacken the Umayyads, showing that they would conspire to kill the one member of their family who did not have their interests at heart. The first khobar is given on the authority of al-Wāqidī; as we have seen in other passages,

1) TT II, 1347-49.

al-Ṭabarī generally used al-Wāqidī either to give the main outlines of an event or to add a detail to a preceding khavar, so there is no incompatibility between al-Wāqidī's and Abū 'Ubayda's accounts of the revolt.

The two short akhbār immediately following are again of the general information type, giving the names of people who performed various duties.¹ The reasons for the abundance of names in these reports have been discussed above; it may also be that these very short akhbār were meant to serve as a sort of breathing space between much longer accounts of events considered more important.

The section concerning 'Umar's imprisonment of Yazīd b. al-Muhallab, whom he had dismissed as 'āmil of Iraq the year before, consists of two akhbār.² Yazīd had been appointed 'āmil by Sulaymān, and during his tenure in Iraq he apparently exaggerated the amount of booty which the troops had taken and could not pay the one-fifth of it due to the central treasury. 'Umar removed him from office and imprisoned him after Yazīd refused to pay what was owed. The first khavar is given on the authority of Abū Mikhnaf through Hishām al-Kalbī, and while it seems to represent 'Umar as the stern but just ruler, it does not quite hide the fact that there was some rivalry between the two men, perhaps because Yazīd had been appointed by Sulaymān to govern the whole of the eastern

1) TT II, 1349.

2) TT II, 1350-52.

part of the empire, a policy with which 'Umar disagreed, as shown by his subsequent action of splitting up the governorship into three separate ones. The second khobar is anonymous; it stresses that Yazīd had many supporters willing to help him defy authority, a fact which is also demonstrated at the end of the preceding khobar. It would seem that al-Ṭabarī used this anonymous khobar mainly because the man named to escort Yazīd to 'Umar is Wakī' b. Ḥassān, who had been succeeded in the post of military commander of Khurasan in 98 by Yazīd himself. Abū Mikhnaf gives a different man in this role, and although al-Ṭabarī knew that the second khobar would lose some impact because of its lack of an isnād, he must have considered it to be a more likely story regarding Yazīd's journey to Syria or, at the very least, to contain more detail about that trip than does the preceding one.

The next account deals with 'Umar's removal of al-Jarrāḥ b. 'Abd Allāh from the governorship of Khurasan.¹ The khobar, related by al-Madā'inī, is fairly long and gives details of some of 'Umar's legal and financial reforms: when 'Umar is told by a Khurasanī mawlā that al-Jarrāḥ favours his own tribesmen above other people in the province and gathers various taxes from people who should not be paying them, 'Umar orders him to stop collecting the jizya from those who have converted to Islam; but al-Jarrāḥ instead has the converts examined to see if they have been

1) TT II, 1352-55.

circumcised, a requirement which he prefers to test their religion rather than 'Umar's command that anyone who prays toward the qibla is to be considered a Muslim. At the end of this account it becomes plain that 'Umar has suspected al-Jarrāḥ for some time of being a brutal and unjust governor. Furthermore, 'Umar's patience with al-Jarrāḥ finally broke because al-Jarrāḥ had set out from Khurasan during the month of Ramadān, when no truly pious Muslim would travel so as to avoid breaking the fast. There is no doubt about the impression left with the reader, that while 'Umar will not condone intolerance and favouritism, his main objection to al-Jarrāḥ is a religious consideration; thus while 'Umar is praised for his piety, at the same time there is an implication that he is also an impractical idealist.

This is followed by the report of 'Umar's new appointments of two men to take al-Jarrāḥ's place, which is also reported on the authority of al-Madā'inī.¹ Here 'Umar is being shown in the role of the wise ruler who consults a man known as an authority on the affairs of Khurasan to determine the appointment; furthermore, the fact that Abū Mijlaz confirms 'Umar's own opinions about the two appointees gives strength to the idea that 'Umar was indeed a knowledgeable ruler. His appointment of two men of opposite character is an obvious effort to counterbalance them in the hope that together they will be able to redress some of the grievances of the province.

1) TT II, 1356-57.

Immediately after these two reports on the problems of Khurasan, there is an account of the beginning of the 'Abbāsīd da'wa.¹ This contains a list of the men sent to Khurasan to act as naqībs for the 'Abbāsīd movement, a list which is found in no other source. The placement of this khābar immediately after two dealing with problems in Khurasan at once strikes the reader as being a statement that the 'Abbāsīds were predestined to become caliphs, that not even the good and pious 'Umar could alleviate the situation in Khurasan to any extent which would soothe the disaffected and prevent the downfall of the Umayyads. The fact that the only isnād given for this khābar is al-Ṭabarī himself strongly indicates that this was his own personal view; one might also suspect that the arbitrary date of the year 100, a date which signaled the end of the first Islamic century and could easily be seen as symbolic, was deliberately assigned to this event so that it could appear exactly in this place.

The year 101 opens with a report of Yazīd b. al-Muhallab's escape from prison, as reported by Abū Mikhnaf.² It seems to be very straightforward, and confirms the fact that Yazīd had many supporters willing to help him. Yazīd gives his reason for escaping as his fear of and enmity toward Yazīd b. 'Abd al-Malik, who was about to become caliph on 'Umar's death. Certainly Yazīd b. al-Muhallab revolted shortly after Yazīd's accession to the caliphate because

1) TT II, 1358.

2) TT II, 1359-61.

he knew that whereas 'Umar had imprisoned him, Yazīd would surely have him killed to prevent him from returning to the power he had held under Sulaymān. The short khobar at the end, given through al-Wāqidī, merely disputes whether 'Umar was dead before or after Yazīd escaped. 'Umar was certainly dying, if not already dead, because Yazīd proceeded to Basra and there raised his revolt.

The rest of the section on 'Umar is entirely taken up with accounts of his death and character.¹ There are several akhbār from various authorities disputing the day of 'Umar's death and his age at the time; as we have seen before, this preoccupation with dates and ages is common throughout al-Ṭabarī. Immediately following are three akhbār which are obviously apochryphal; they emphasize 'Umar's relationship with 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb and tell the legend that 'Umar's caliphate and pious character had been foretold before his birth. As a youth, he had been scarred by a horse kicking him in the face; this scar supposedly marked him as the man who would "fill the earth with justice". These akhbār also serve as an introduction to the following section on his character.

This is a long section with several akhbār from different authorities, the main part coming through al-Madā'inī. The isnāds and arrangement of the akhbār in this section do not appear to have the importance they do elsewhere. The akhbār consist of accounts of 'Umar's writings, sayings

1) TT II, 1361-68.

and sermons which contain pious remarks concerning what people should say and do. The letters are usually addressed to one of his governors, giving advice on how he should conduct himself; although some details of certain of 'Umar's financial reforms may also be found here, the akhbār are obviously being used to illustrate his just and pious nature and not his concern with legal or economic affairs as such. However, bearing in mind that the reader would know what happened to the Umayyads after 'Umar's death, one can also see here an attempt to show that 'Umar's efforts at reform were doomed to failure because they were not continued by his successors, who preferred to return to a life of luxury and wealth which they acquired by deliberately oppressing the non-Arab elements of the community.

The last part of this section is an addendum on 'Umar's character and death which was apparently added at a later date, as it stated that it "is not from the text of Abū Ja'far".¹ These akhbār stress even further 'Umar's piety and concern for his subjects' religious welfare and the almost mystical nature of his death. - Obviously a later editor of the Ta'rīkh here found a chance to insert some information which seems to have none of the overtones of al-Ṭabarī's choice of material and thus to make of 'Umar an even more exalted character.

1) TT II, 1368-72. This section was apparently taken from Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam's Sīra; cf. TT II, 1368-69, with Sīra, op. cit., 41-42, and TT II, 1372, with Sīra, 119.

The entire section on 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz gives, at first glance, merely the impression that al-Ṭabarī considers 'Umar as a good man who had attempted to fulfill his duties as caliph according to the dictates of his conscience; however, as we have seen, the positioning of and hints found in certain of the akhbār embody some criticism of 'Umar and, to a greater extent, of the Umayyads as a whole, the earlier caliphs for not adhering to the standards of the Prophet, Abū Bakr and 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, the later ones for not following 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz's example and for returning to a mode of life which was not compatible with their duties as leaders of the Prophet's umma.

As we have seen in dealing with the previous accounts, the annalistic form is not conducive to permitting the author to conceive of any sort of relationship between events; each incident stands alone, with only the immediate cause being identified and included in the account. It would seem, however, that in this section there is possibly a more advanced form of cause and effect relationships between events, especially when one considers the placement of the khābar concerning the beginning of the 'Abbāsīd da'wa. Al-Ṭabarī is clearly saying that the oppressive policies and desire for luxury and wealth of the Umayyads were the cause of the success of the 'Abbāsīd movement, and the attempts of 'Umar to rectify the situation had no effect whatsoever.

Although 'Umar was caliph for only two and a half years, al-Ṭabarī devotes a comparatively large amount of

space to the events of this time, and one-fourth of this section is concerned with 'Umar's character. Such an inordinate proportion indicates that al-Ṭabarī felt that the Caliph's personality was one of the major points for which 'Umar was to be, and should be, remembered. The letters and sayings which are quoted in the Ta'rīkh were included because they gave some insight into those aspects of 'Umar's character which al-Ṭabarī himself may have thought commendable.

These akhbār stress 'Umar's piety and illustrate the advice which he gave his governors on how to perform their duties and deal with their subjects. 'Umar counsels the doing of good deeds, being kind and hospitable to the poor and to all follow Muslims, and urges that they remember that one's soul is more important than any earthly possession. Above all, 'Umar repeats again and again the need for dealing justly with people, for hearing both sides of a complaint before giving judgment. He expressed his doubts about being caliph and his determination to do his best when he wrote to Yazīd b. al-Muhallab shortly after his succession:

Truly, that to which God appointed me and which He decreed for me is not easy. Even if my inclination were in acquiring wives or wealth, there is something in what He has given me that has already led me to the best [afdāl] which any of His creatures has experienced. Because of the task that has been inflicted upon me, I fear that there will be an

ultimate accounting and severe interrogation, unless God in His mercy shows forgiveness.¹

He emphasizes kindness and hospitality in a letter to the 'āmil of Samarqand, Sulaymān b. Abī al-Sarī, which implies that this should be done for all Muslims and not a favoured elite:

Build caravanserais in your territory. Any Muslim who passes that way should be lodged for one day and night, and his beasts cared for. Any one who falls ill should be kept two days and nights; if he has to leave, give him something which will enable him to return to his own land.²

Again writing to Sulaymān, 'Umar stresses the need for fairness and impartial judgment in dealing with complaints, insisting that Arabs should not be favoured above the native population:

The people of Samarqand have complained to me of an injustice which befell them and of unjust treatment by Qutayba, who made them leave their land. As soon as you receive this letter, seat a qādī for them to look into the matter. If he passed judgment in their favour, send [the Arabs] back to their camps [across the Oxus], so that everything will be as it was before Qutayba conquered them.³

1) TT II, 1363.

2) TT II, 1364.

3) TT II, 1365.

Perhaps 'Umar is most impressive when he urges his governors to remember the importance of a man's soul and of working for his Faith. He writes to 'Abd al-Ḥamīd, his governor of Kufa, that

The foundation of the Faith is justice and good deeds. There is nothing more important to you than your soul; for there is no such thing as a small sin.¹

In a letter to 'Abd al-Rahmān b. Nu'aym, one of two governors appointed by 'Umar to Khurasan, he states:

Deed [al-'amal] and knowledge [al-'ilm] are closely related; so be knowing of God and act for Him. Many people have knowledge, but do not work; thus their knowledge is a curse upon them.²

At times there is almost an element of pleading in 'Umar's constant reiteration of these points. While not detracting from 'Umar's piety, this emphasizes his human qualities and transforms him from an unworldly pious ascetic into a man truly concerned for his fellow Muslims' religious welfare. Al-Ṭabarī could have felt that these qualities of 'Umar were wholly admirable to have devoted so much space to them. Perhaps he felt that 'Umar was seriously trying to carry out his duties according to the Qur'ān and the sunna of the Prophet, at a time when personal accounts of Muḥammad could no longer be learned from men but only from

1) TT II, 1366.

2) TT II, 1364.

hadīths. Al-Ṭabarī's knowledge of the strife that was to succeed 'Umar's death, the struggle which would end with the downfall of the Umayyad family, possibly made him even more aware of the situation of his own times, when the Caliph was left to rule over only a small portion of the lands which 'Umar had controlled. He may have felt that although 'Umar's efforts eventually failed, they were nonetheless serious attempts to remedy the ills of the empire; and that the empire of his own time needed some such reforms, and a man of similar beliefs, to avoid the fate of the preceding dynasty.

Finally, one should also note here that al-Ṭabarī again shows the characteristic trait of Islamic historians; he looks back in time to find a model for existing society. The exemplar par excellence was, of course, the time of the Prophet; but in al-Ṭabarī's eyes, the caliphate of 'Umar would have presented an example closer to the situation of his own times, when the umma had embraced a much larger portion of the world and consequently had different problems to deal with than did the much smaller community of Muḥammad. 'Umar, facing a crisis of gigantic proportions and attempting to handle it by changing the structure of society, could not fail to have been an appealing character to a man of al-Ṭabarī's time.

Islam represented the perfection of human order, consecrated by God Himself through the revelations made to Muḥammad. Accepting this, a man such as al-Ṭabarī, well-informed of the development of this social organization

throughout the centuries after Muḥammad, was of necessity impelled to seek the explanation of those defects which had entered into this order in the departure of individuals from the true precepts of the Prophet. All the evils that had befallen Islamic society since the death of the Prophet had to be explained as of human agency; while he might for prudential reasons hesitate to impute blame directly and explicitly, he could achieve the same impact on his readers by stressing the qualities of those pious and virtuous individuals such as 'Umar who were prepared to accept without question or modification the political organization which presumably originated with God. Living in the semi-anarchical political situation in which he did, one would expect to find in a man such as al-Ṭabarī despair of his fellow men; and yet it is because there is no period on which he reports that does not include men of the character of 'Umar that he can still hope for the final restoration of the true Islamic umma, and at the same time remain an impartial observer of the failures and disasters in which his history abounds.

The first siege of Baghdad

The conflict between the two sons of Hārūn al-Rashīd, Muḥammad al-Amīn and 'Abd Allāh al-Ma'mūn, culminated in the siege of Baghdad in 197-98 by al-Ma'mūn's generals, Ṭāhir b. al-Ḥusayn and Harṭhama b. A'yan. The city was almost totally reduced to ashes - a devastation from which

certain quarters never recovered - resulting from the severity with which Ṭāhir and Harṭhama prosecuted their operations and the determined resistance of that section of the Baghdad populace which supported al-Amīn, called in the sources "rabble" or "the naked ones". Although the war between the two brothers divided Islamic society for a time, it does not seem that it was fought for any idealistic purposes, but was a straightforward struggle for power between the two men and their supporters. It does not seem to have been a conflict between Persians and Arabs, or the eastern and western provinces, an interpretation which some modern scholars have propounded, viewing it as the religio-political aspect of the conflict whose literary manifestation was the Shu'ūbiyya controversy.¹

The account found in the Ta'rīkh is the earliest one of any detail which exists today; although it is difficult to trace al-Ṭabarī's sources for this section, it is possible that he used the Ta'rīkh Baghdād of Aḥmad b. Abī Ṭāhir Ṭayfūr.²

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- 1) See, for example, Muir, The Caliphate, op. cit., 484-91. Although this view is now largely outdated, it can still be found in works which are largely based on western authors such as Muir; e.g. S.B. Samadi, "The Struggle between the Two Brothers al-Amin and al-Mamun", Islamic Culture XXXII (1958), 99-120.
 - 2) On the author, see above, p. 37. Of his Ta'rīkh Baghdād, only the section dealing with the caliphate of al-Ma'mūn has survived: A. Keller ed. and trans., Sechster Band der Kitāb Baghdād (Leipzig, 1908).

In addition to general histories of the period, the most important secondary source is Guy Le Strange's Baghdad During the Abbasid Caliphate, which is essential for understanding the topography of the city, and is largely based on the fourth century geographer Ibn Serapion.¹

The account of the siege in the Ta'rīkh can be dealt with in two parts. The first is concerned almost exclusively with Ṭāhir's and Harṭhama's preparations for the siege and with the various fights which took place not only between their troops and al-Amīn's army, but also between their troops and the lawless rabble in the city.² The desertions of al-Amīn's leaders and the gradual abandonment of the defence of the city by the populace, especially the merchants, are emphasized; descriptions of the destruction of various quarters of Baghdad and of the desperation of the inhabitants who have no provisions and fear the gangs of looters roaming the city, are vivid, often expressed in verse.

In complete contrast, the second part of the account concentrates on al-Amīn and his actions during the last few days of the siege.³ He attempts to escape, but is foiled by Ṭāhir, who threatens al-Amīn's generals if they help him. He then decided to surrender to Harṭhama, as he does not trust

1) G. Le Strange, Baghdad During the Abbasid Caliphate (Oxford, 1900). A short account of the first siege, taken from al-Ṭabarī, is found in 306-10.

2) TT III, 868-903.

3) TT III, 903-25.

Ṭāhir; but he is ultimately captured by the latter's men and is killed on his order. His head is placed over one of the city gates before being sent to al-Ma'mūn. This section is much more concerned with a single protagonist than the first, being almost totally devoted to al-Amīn himself. There are a few sentences in various akhbār which give us a picture of al-Amīn as a weak character, addicted to wine and women:

After the incident at the Ṣāliḥ fortress, Muḥammad occupied himself with amusements and drink, entrusting other affairs to Muḥammad b. 'Isā b. Nahīk and al-Ḥirsh.¹

Nevertheless, one receives a rather sympathetic picture of him in the last few days of his life, heightened by the fact that while he admits his fear, he nonetheless dies bravely.

He said, "Aḥmad?" I replied, "Here, my lord." He said, "Come and hold me, for I am very frightened." I pulled him to me, and his heart was beating so hard that it was nearly driven out of his breast.²

A man named Khumārawayh, the slave of Quraysh al-Dandānī, Ṭāhir's mawla, entered and struck him with his sword; the blow fell on his forehead. Muḥammad hit him in the face with the pillow he was holding, and pressed on it in order to take the sword from his hand. Khumārawayh cried out in Persian, "He has killed me! He has killed me!"

1) TT III, 832.

2) TT III, 921-22.

Several men rushed in and one of them stabbed him in the waist with his sword. They rushed at him and stabbed him in the back and cut off his head.¹

It is also worth noting that this section is almost totally devoid of poetry, whereas the first part depends on it heavily. The verses at the beginning of this account concentrate to a large degree on comparing the present devastation of Baghdad to its former beauties; while this is a very effective device and conveys the misery of the siege well, it is at the same time impersonal and lacking in human appeal. The second part emphasizes al-Amīn's feelings and fears, which draws one closer to the action and makes the reader feel more personally involved.

However, there is some indication that, however much al-Ṭabarī may have sympathized with al-Amīn in his last days, he was not inclined to feel favour towards him as a caliph. Al-Amīn is always referred to as "Muḥammad" or "Muḥammad b. Hārūn"; he is never called khalīfa, and only when one of his courtiers speaks is he given the title Amīr al-Mu'mimīn (but sayyidī is preferred for direct address). In contrast, al-Ma'mūn is almost always referred to by his regnal title, and only al-Amīn calls him "'Abd Allāh". By using akhbār which do not mention the regnal title "al-Amīn", but which do use "al-Ma'mūn", the impression is given that al-Ṭabarī is denying al-Amīn's right to the dignity of the caliphate; by doing so, he effectively solves the problem

1) TT III, 923.

of a future caliph leading a revolt against the present one, a situation which he would have found hard to countenance.

In this section al-Ṭabarī does not rely on any one source for the general outlines of the event, as he does for the other incidents which we have examined; it may be that there was little in the way of a detailed narrative of the siege available to him, or that for other reasons he preferred to use various accounts. Because these akhbār are fairly short and come from different sources, the continuity of the narrative is broken. Furthermore, the short isnāds are introduced by verbs of indirect transmission which, with few exceptions, are passive; these ambiguous verbs serve to break the continuity even further. The transmitters are either historical personages, such as Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī, who after al-Amīn's death would be proclaimed caliph in Baghdad for a short period, or unknown men; only al-Madā'inī qualifies as a scholar. Thus al-Ṭabarī gives his sources at second-hand, with no intervening link to indicate exactly where he got his information; this makes the reader rather suspicious, and gives the entire section an air of being hearsay evidence. Why al-Ṭabarī should not give his informants is rather difficult to understand, but as the siege took place shortly before his own birth he may have felt that it was rather dangerous to indicate the sources of his information for fear of what reaction might be provoked among some of his own contemporaries.

As we have discussed in the earlier sections, the emphasis upon names is one of the outstanding features of

the Ta'rīkh; but in this account we find far fewer names listed and a tendency to lump people together into a group which is then given a generic name. Al-Amīn's supporters in the city are always called rabble, rogues, vagrants, pickpockets, thieves, criminals; during the final stages of the siege, these lawless elements roamed the city preying on the other inhabitants as well as fighting Ṭāhir's and Harthama's troops:

Time is passing, but not their murders;

Houses are destroyed and possessions decreased.

The people are powerless towards those who make requests,

Unable to ward off Destruction, even though they strive.

They bring to us every day a story without light,

Tales concerning sons of adultery.¹

They were, moreover, the only people (excepting his own small circle of courtiers) who remained loyal to al-Amīn up to his death, although at the very end of this account it is said that they were faithful to him only because he had been very liberal in giving them money, food, and other property and provisions. This element of society had its parallel in al-Ṭabarī's time, known as the Ḥanbalites, who roamed the city much in the same way that the rabble did in al-Amīn's period; furthermore, the Ḥanbalites on more than one occasion threatened al-Ṭabarī with bodily harm, if not death, because he did not agree with their own religious-political views. Therefore, it would be a matter of prudence of al-Ṭabarī's part not to reveal his sources of information,

1) TT III, 897.

especially as they were so derogatory about this segment of the populace, and thus he could avoid implicating other people who might well have suffered at the hands of the Ḥanbalites. There can be no doubt, however, that al-Ṭabarī regarded these people as a menace to society, not especially because of their beliefs, but rather because they were virtually lawless and uncontrollable and seriously threatened the peace and security of every day life in Baghdad.

One can only speculate on the composition of these mobs that terrorized the city at the time of the first siege, using their support of al-Amīn as a pretext for looting and violence. What must be taken into consideration, however, is the fact that Baghdad had not yet developed an urban mode of life in which the various segments of its population would have established a rapport, one with another. The only institutional life was that of the court and the mosque, the market place not yet having evolved its own characteristic structure. The ethos of the countryside still prevailed, with groups feeling no commitment or obligation to the inclusive civic community. Therefore, one could destroy without feeling that the detriment would ultimately be visited on himself also, and as long as his own quarter was secure he could deplete and destroy other quarters in gratification of the most elemental of human urges. An urban civilization which could absorb disparate elements from a wide variety of origins was yet to develop; and perhaps the greatest contrast between the scene at the time of the first siege and the occasional anarchy of al-Ṭabarī's own day was that

by his time a truly urban life had developed. This must have coloured his view of the incidents he was narrating, for based on his own experience they could only be interpreted as injurious to an urbanized life which, in fact, did not really exist.

It is quite possible that al-Ṭabarī would have seen the first siege of Baghdad as a situation parallel to the chaos of the city in his own time. One can see similarities in the character of al-Amīn, weak, timid, given to luxury, addicted to wine, and totally ineffectual as a ruler, and in the caliphs of al-Ṭabarī's time, who were equally impotent and were dominated by the army or a circle of self-seeking advisers. The city itself was prey to the lawless segments of the populace. In both cases, the empire is divided and on the verge of breaking up, although in al-Ṭabarī's day it was much more so than during the conflict between al-Amīn and al-Ma'mūn. In fact, Baghdad during the first siege can be seen as a metaphor for the entire empire of al-Ṭabarī's time: ruled by an ineffectual sovereign, torn apart by alien forces as well as its own inhabitants, quarter by quarter it fell to the enemy, just as in later times province after province would fall into the hands of forces strong enough to maintain virtually independent rule for a time. But the first siege of Baghdad had a happy ending; after a few further troubles, it surrendered to al-Ma'mūn and became, once again, the capital of the empire. The question which must have posed itself to al-Ṭabarī was whether or not the empire of his day could solve its problems and once again

be united. From the example of the first siege, the answer would be yes; but the later conflict involved matters of religio-political belief which do not seem to have been present in the previous period and which would affect the situation in a different way. As we have seen in the other accounts, it is most probable that al-Ṭabarī was an optimist in these matters; he may have believed that it would be possible for the umma (as opposed to the empire) to live once again in peace and security, following the path which God had intended for it, but that this could only be done if the community concerned itself with the problems facing it and tried to find a practical solution to them, even if he were not prepared to suggest what this solution might be. Al-Ṭabarī's work could only derive its authority and acceptability from the attitude of impersonality which he affected in its presentation; any explicit personal comment would have been seized upon by one or another of the factions in the community to serve its own particular cause.

Al-Ṭabarī's Historical Perspective

Within any one given historical work, it is usually possible to identify a unifying theme around which the author has woven his material in order to justify his interpretation of events or to explain certain incidents from a single point of view. A modern historian generally indicates his theme explicitly, by calling his work an economic or religious history or by including a statement of the hypotheses from which he has worked to arrive at his own particular interpretation. However, the central theme of an historical work may often not be quite so apparent at first, either because the author has deliberately failed to indicate it or because it remains an unexpressed assumption on the part of the writer.

As we have seen in the five events which we have examined above, al-Ṭabarī's treatment of each incident is centred on the personalities involved or, to be more precise, on one individual who is seen as the major figure of the event; thus Mu'āwiyā is subordinated to 'Alī and al-Ma'mūn to al-Amīn. The vast majority of early Islamic historical writers conceived of history as the relationships between people, especially between those personalities who held positions of authority in society and guided their community in religious and secular matters; these leaders are seen as the representatives of the entire community. It would seem, then, that the central, unifying theme of the Ta'rīkh is the umma, that is to say, the Islamic community in its

broadest aspect and as a development from the ideal society which existed in the age of the Prophet. The major figures of each event are those people who have a claim to authority of some sort in the umma; that this authority may sometimes be symbolic, as in the case of the later 'Abbāsid caliphs, does not change the fact that the man who claims it is still, theoretically, the representative of the entire community.

Pre-Islamic history is generally presented in the Ta'rīkh as the history of the conflict between prophets and kings, that is between the leader of the religious umma and the leader of the secular umma; the religious community takes precedence because it is a direct ancestor of that umma, the final one, founded by Muḥammad at Medina. All these communities were inspired by God and founded in accordance with His will, and it is, above all, the history of God's ummas which al-Ṭabarī is trying to illuminate. After dealing with Biblical history, al-Ṭabarī devotes himself almost wholly to Persian history; he has written that he chose to record the history of Persian rather than that of other ancient nations because the Persian empire had survived longer than any other and was the immediate ancestor of the Islamic umma.¹

The community founded by Muḥammad was not only the last of the divinely inspired ummas to be established but also the ordained culmination of all earlier ones. Guided by divine law as found in the Qur'ān and by the sunna of

1) TT I, 353.

the Prophet, which may be regarded as simply another manifestation of God's law, the earliest Islamic umma was a rather democratic community; all of its members participated in daily decisions and activities and were consulted about occasional problems, such as choosing a new leader to whom they would then swear allegiance. Although individual participation in most of these activities became impractical, and even impossible, the fiction was maintained for centuries; al-Ṭabarī's adherence to this ideal, by choosing the umma as the unifying factor for his Ta'rīkh, demonstrates his faith in the future unity of the community.

It is, thus, inevitable that al-Ṭabarī should be interested mainly in the central government, for it epitomizes the umma. His silence on such subjects as the conquest of Spain can be explained as having little importance for the community as a whole. Spain would have represented a special problem to al-Ṭabarī; since it had been ruled by an Umayyad caliph for over one hundred and fifty years, this could have implied a division in the umma. On the other hand, it should be noted that he is really not interested in any but the central provinces, and it is probably for this reason that he does not report anything about Spain; he would have considered it excentric to the empire. Details which may appear trivial to the modern eye, such as naming the leader of the hajj or the annual military expedition against Byzantium, assume great importance to al-Ṭabarī because they are communal activities in which any member of the umma may participate.

It is interesting to note that in the five sections we have discussed, it is in the account dealing with Ṣiffīn and the arbitration, in which the umma is in danger of being split, that al-Ṭabarī employs akhbār which stress the use of the term umma. Throughout the Islamic section of the Ta'rīkh, terms such as jamā'a or nās are much more commonly used to indicate the community of Muslims. While it may be coincidental that the term umma appears in these akhbār it would seem more likely that one of the reasons al-Ṭabarī chose to use Abū Mikhnaf for this account is this emphasis on the word umma, to demonstrate that the community was indeed one entity and must remain so despite attempts to destroy its unity.

Al-Ṭabarī's emphasis on the umma and its leader thus forces him to adopt an inflexible attitude toward the caliphate. While it was possible for him to separate the office from the man who held it, he could not compromise the dignity of the office itself. What may be seen as an attempt to deny al-Amīn the title of caliph was probably a necessary attitude in al-Ṭabarī; otherwise al-Na'mūn's revolt would destroy the theory that the caliph is the rightfully elected leader of the umma and guides it on the path set down by God and the Prophet. Furthermore, if one accepts that a future caliph can lead a successful revolt against the present one, the result would be a deviation from the right path and a reflection on the Prophet, whose deputy the caliph was, and ultimately on God Himself for allowing such a deviation. However, al-Ṭabarī had to consider the caliph as being the best man for the job. The

umma theoretically elected its leader, and, while it could make a bad choice, it would never choose a man who would lead it to any doctrine which was not a part of the divinely sanctioned religion; the Prophet himself is reported to have said that God would not allow the umma to agree on an error.¹ Therefore, the fragmentation of the community during al-Ṭabarī's lifetime could not be ascribed to bad leadership, but must be due to non- or anti-Islamic elements, which the umma must overcome in order to return to the stability and unity which God had intended for it.

The theme of the history of the umma from the Creation to al-Ṭabarī's own time must have been chosen quite deliberately; not only did it give a focus to the work as a whole, but it also emphasizes the continuity of the umma throughout history. The umma was ordained by God from the moment that He created Adam, and the communities of pre-Islamic times existed by His will until circumstances were just right for the appearance of the last of His prophets and the foundation of the last of His ummas. All pre-Islamic history was merely the testing ground, as it were, for Islam; all roads led to Islam. The umma founded by Muhammad at Medina was the culmination of the entire history of the world; although there would never again be such a perfect society, the umma of all later times must strive to approximate its perfection by following the laws set down in the Qur'ān and in the sunna of the Prophet.

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1) A.J. Wensinck, Concordance et Indices de la Tradition Musulmane I (Leiden, 1936), 364.

We have still to consider the question of why al-Ṭabarī wrote the Ta'rīkh. There are many possible explanations for this; it may have been simply because he was a scholar and felt that a comprehensive history of the world which explained events adequately had not yet been written, and the Ta'rīkh was meant to fill this gap. However, another explanation suggests itself when one considers the period in which al-Ṭabarī was writing and the activities of other scholars of the time.

Al-Ṭabarī lived during an era which saw the more or less final development of Islamic society into the pattern which would be maintained for centuries to come. The lines of demarcation had been drawn and had stabilized society in the sense that the composition of and standards for living in that community were taking final shape; only major upheavals, such as the Mongol invasions, would have much effect on the daily life of the members of this society. It was precisely during this time, as has been pointed out in the first chapter, that the codification of law, ḥadīth and, to a lesser extent, literature were done: this compilation was, in fact, the major literary activity of the period.

Islamic society had, thus, become stabilized to the point that it could now be concerned with questions involving its existence; it felt a need to justify and explain its present condition within the context of the past. Most previous historical works had been episodic and incidental, explaining the rise of Islam in monographs devoted to certain

specified historical events; these were now found to be unsatisfactory and lacking for a society which needed a sustained explanation and justification for its existence. The very concept of a universal or world history could only grow out of a situation like this; in earlier periods, the community was too occupied with establishing and maintaining itself wherever it took root to be very concerned about its role in history. Although it may seem paradoxical to say that society was stabilized when the empire was slowly crumbling away, this, too, must be seen as part of the reason for its concern about the past. If the empire seemed to be disintegrating, a comprehensive view of the past with all its vicissitudes would serve to put the present in its proper perspective and afford reassurance about the future.

Al-Ṭabarī, then, and on a lesser scale al-Ya'qūbī before him, was concerned with setting the Islamic order into the universal context, as the culmination of which it was conceived. Its continuity with the past was just as important, if not more so, as the break with the past had been important to the earlier Islamic community. Moreover, it was not coincidental that the compilations of law and hadīth were being done during the same period in which al-Ṭabarī was attempting to demonstrate the continuity of history; just as these codifications were meant to provide a basis for a standard of what was conceived as the good and ideal life, so too would al-Ṭabarī's "compilation" of historical akhbār serve as the basis for the justification of that life in terms of human history.

Furthermore, as will be discussed in the next chapter, the two universal histories which preceded the Ta'rīkh and with which al-Ṭabarī could easily have been familiar, were written with definite views in mind: al-Dīnawarī was concerned almost entirely with Persian history and discussed only those events in Islam which had consequences for the eastern provinces; al-Ya'qūbī appears to have been writing from a basically moderate Shī'ī stand. For a man of al-Ṭabarī's learning and reputation, it would have seemed necessary that a similar work be produced which would explain and justify the orthodox view of Islamic history and that it be done in such a way that it would successfully refute any other work of a different perspective. For this very reason, the technique which al-Ṭabarī employed was ideal for his purpose; the careful noting of isnāds and verbatim quotation of his sources would allow no accusation of falsification of his material, a charge to which authors such as al-Dīnawarī and al-Ya'qūbī would be very susceptible. The painstaking notation of variations for nearly every section of the Ta'rīkh could be used to hide the fact that al-Ṭabarī so often relies on one source for the vast majority of his information, an authority whose views were essentially his own; this is exactly the point that many modern scholars have praised, the fact that so many sources were employed and preserved, while they note only in passing the reliance on one main authority. The wood is hidden because of the trees, and unless one examines the Ta'rīkh more closely, is likely to remain so. Nor did al-Ṭabarī stop there; by citing authorities considered to be Shī'ī or pro-'Alid

(sometimes on rather slim evidence), or who were believed to have belonged to another of the non-orthodox sects, he could lend a further degree of "impartiality" to his work. Perhaps an even more decisive factor was, quite simply, its size; the very volume of the Ta'rīkh attested the seriousness with which it was undertaken and elevated it above mere story-telling, thereby demanding that it be read with a respect similar to that accorded other comprehensive works of fiqh and hadīth. In this respect it reduced all such other comparable histories to the level of handbooks.

This leads naturally to the question of what al-Ṭabarī conceived as the historical process, apart from its interpretation as the will of God working through human activity. It should be noted that al-Ṭabarī is concerned solely with the past, that is to say with those events the outcome of which he was already familiar; the events of his own time are merely chronicled, with little elaboration beyond a simple outline of each incident. A detailed study of his own time, similar to the examination to which he had subjected events of the further past, would have led necessarily to an assumption about the patterns of human behaviour in historical situations which may have allowed, if not the possibility of prediction about the future, at least the inspiring of confidence that it, too, would be meaningful within the guiding intention of God. Consequently, despite all the vicissitudes and disorders which he records in the history of Islam down to his own time, the prevailing mood of the Ta'rīkh is one of optimism, and even the disasters

of greatest magnitude can be recounted in a non-committal and dispassionate fashion, with the assurance that the culmination will always be in accordance with God's divine plan for the progress of His selected people.

Clearly, too, there is a distinction in the mind of al-Ṭabarī between the common occurrences in daily life and those events which have consequences that afford a chain of continuity for human experience. The lack of details about financial and economic matters, social structure, and even administration on the lower levels, while keenly missed by modern scholars, had no place in al-Ṭabarī's design because they were constantly changing variables, the recording of which he would have felt to be intrusive and extraneous. There was no place in the Ta'rīkh for matters which did not, in some way, serve to emphasize the umma and its position within the whole of history.

CHAPTER IV

THE ACCOUNTS OF THREE CONTEMPORARY HISTORIANS

All of the theories and hypotheses heretofore mentioned have been based on an internal analysis of the Ta'rīkh, with reference to earlier works and to al-Ṭabarī's life and times. In this chapter we will compare the accounts of three contemporary historical writers with those in the Ta'rīkh which we have already examined. Although this discussion will, of necessity, be limited in its scope, it is hoped that through a comparison of these accounts al-Ṭabarī's attitudes and perspective may become clearer in the light of what other scholars of the time were doing and thinking.

The three writers whom we shall discuss in this chapter, al-Dīnawarī, al-Ya'qūbī and al-Mas'ūdī, have been chosen because they composed historical works similar to the Ta'rīkh; these works are called universal histories and seem to be the first of that genre to have appeared in the Islamic world. The fact that they have a structural resemblance and follow a chronological pattern, whether in the form of annals or a division of time according to the reigns of kings and caliphs, give them a superficial similarity which is often belied by the difference in subject matter and scope.

Abū Ḥanīfa Ahmad b. Dā'ūd al-Dīnawarī
and the al-Akḥbār al-Ṭiwāl

As with so many early Islamic scholars, very little is known about al-Dīnawarī's life. His grandfather's name, Wanand, indicates his Persian origin, and he most probably resided in the town of Dīnawar for a time, as shown by his nisba; the date of his death is disputed, but was probably about 282, which places him a generation before al-Ṭabarī. Like many cultured men of the day, al-Dīnawarī had a wide range of interests; he studied and wrote on mathematics, the natural sciences, philology, and Qur'ānic sciences, in addition to history. It is mainly for his scientific contributions that he is remembered, especially his Kitāb al-Nabāt, in which he built on earlier works as well as his own knowledge; its chief purpose seems to have been lexicographical.¹

Al-Dīnawarī's short history, al-Akḥbār al-Ṭiwāl, generally follows an Iranian point of view; it concentrates on the Sāsānids, and after the coming of Islam, on the provinces which they had formerly controlled. He gives no isnāds, apart from occasionally reporting a khabar on the authority of an eye-witness, and combines the akḥbār into a continuous narrative; it has been stated that his major aim was to write a book for its literary and entertaining qualities, and it does seem that as an historical

1) IN, 73; Yqt I, 123-27; GAL I, 127-28, SI, 187; B. Lewin, "al-Dīnawarī", EI² II, 300; Din, Préface, 20-56.

work it was little noticed by his contemporaries or later authors.¹ History, in fact, was one of the few vehicles for "creative" writing in prose, and was in later periods to become the fund of story and romance which fed the imaginations of those classes to whom the repertoire of the common storyteller would have seemed trivial and frivolous.

It is curious that al-Dīnawarī includes nothing of the battle at Dhū Qār, as this is directly relevant to Persian history; perhaps he felt it to be a minor incident despite the exposure it received from other authors, or he may have had no sources with which he agreed. The Prophet is hardly mentioned, and the only references to the conflict at Badr occur in other contexts.² We will, therefore, attempt to understand something of Ṣiffīn, the caliphate of 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz, and the first siege of Baghdad.

Ṣiffīn

The caliphate of 'Alī is the longest section devoted to a caliph in the book, comprising nearly one-fifth of the work; over a third of this is given over to the conflict at Ṣiffīn and the arbitration.³ This in itself is an indication of the importance which al-Dīnawarī attached to this

1) Lewin, op. cit.

2) Din, 20, 277.

3) Din, 178-215.

event; furthermore, the fact that he follows the history of the eastern provinces throughout his work, and living at a time when Shī'ī sympathies were growing in this area of the empire, implies that he may be sympathetic to 'Alī.

The account found in the al-Akḥbār al-Ṭiwāl follows the general line of that in the Ta'rīkh; since al-Ṭabarī used Abū Mikḥnaf as his chief authority and al-Dīnawarī employed Naṣr b. Muzāḥim whom, as we have seen, also relied on Abū Mikḥnaf, we have no major disagreement here.¹ Al-Dīnawarī apparently also added some details from other sources. The major difference between the two accounts is that al-Dīnawarī, by combining his akḥbār into a continuous narrative, has systematized the material in an attempt to present it more coherently. Thus we find a list of the commanders of each section of both armies, rather than the occasional mention found in the Ta'rīkh, and a short description of the topography of the Euphrates River at Ṣiffīn, which greatly clarifies the initial fight for access to water.²

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- 1) Petersen's statements, 161-62, should be modified in the light of the fact that Naṣr b. Muzāḥim has been shown to have used Abū Mikḥnaf extensively. His statement that al-Dīnawarī may have used Abū Mikḥnaf through the intermediary of Hishām b. al-Kalbī is quite possible; as we have seen, al-Ṭabarī and Naṣr b. Muzāḥim were apparently using two different versions of Abū Mikḥnaf, but both agree to the extent that they are sometimes verbatim quotations from an earlier source.
- 2) Din, 182-84, 173-79.

Al-Dīnawarī also reports the fraternization between members of both armies during times of negotiation between fighting, and states that both sides hoped that a reconciliation would be effected.¹ Thus, he paves the way for the Syrian call to arbitration, and the agreement to it by large numbers of 'Alī's supporters is given an explicit foundation; the strategem, devised by 'Amr b. al-'Āṣ, of raising muṣāḥif on spears then becomes a bit less deceitful, in that it is a manifestation of the hopes among the rank and file for peace.² However, in reporting the arbitration agreement, al-Dīnawarī has chosen one of two versions from Naṣr b. Muzāḥim, which has a decidedly pro-'Alid slant.³ Combined

1) Din, 180.

2) Petersen, 166.

3) Din, 206-10; Petersen, 167, fn. 36, says that al-Dīnawarī "chooses here quite logically the Shiite one"; what he means by "logically" is rather difficult to say, and confuses the issue. Furthermore, he does not distinguish between Shī'ī and pro-'Alid sympathies; it is very possible for a person to admire the character of 'Alī without subscribing to the doctrine of any of the later sects known as Shī'a. Martin Hinds, "The Siffin Arbitration Agreement", Journal of Semitic Studies XVII (1972), 93-129, has shown that the version of the agreement reported by Naṣr b. Muzāḥim and used by al-Dīnawarī ("Version B") is most likely a later pro-'Alid elaboration on the version reported in other works, including the Ta'rīkh; see especially 102-08.

with his insistence on the legality of 'Alī's election as caliph, it would appear that he regards 'Alī as he would any of the Rāshidūn, the democratically chosen leader of the umma, and gives him the veneration due not only one of the rightly-guided caliphs but also a man deserving of a special place above and beyond others.¹

Al-Dīnawarī's attitude towards the Khawārij would appear to be similar to that of al-Ṭabarī. However, in his account he does not mention the first secession of the Khawārij and their return to 'Alī; it is only after the breakdown of the arbitration meeting that he reports their defection.² While this may be due to the structure of his work and a wish not to break the narrative between the arbitration agreement at Ṣiffīn and the actual arbitration, it does tend to make the Khawārij a separate problem, only tenuously linked with the happenings at Ṣiffīn. Furthermore, it quite explicitly indicates that it was only after the breakdown of the arbitration, when the Khawārij realized that matters had not turned out as they had hoped, that they decided to withdraw their support from 'Alī. This

1) On 'Alī's election as caliph, see Din, 149-51; Petersen, 164-66, 168. If we accept that Petersen has wrongly characterized al-Ṭabarī's attitudes, as discussed above, then his conclusion that "Dīnawarī thus approaches Ṭabarī's standpoint, only from the Shiite side", must be modified accordingly. Cf. also Khalidi, 126-27.

2) Din, 215.

is in complete contrast to the account in the Ta'rīkh, which indicates that they were vacillating almost immediately after the arbitration agreement was signed. Thus, while al-Ṭabarī sees the Khawārij as intimately involved almost to the point of being one of the causes for the failure of the arbitration, al-Dīnawarī would seem to view their rebellion as a result of that failure.

The caliphate of 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz

This very short, almost perfunctory, account is divided into two parts: the decision of Sulaymān to appoint 'Umar as his successor and 'Umar's reign as caliph. The section on the succession is rather different from the account in the Ta'rīkh.¹ Al-Dīnawarī has Sulaymān making his decision without any advice; it is only when the people wish to know the name of the person to whom they are swearing allegiance, that Rajā' b. Ḥaywa appears. He learns from Sulaymān that 'Umar has been appointed, and immediately tells Hishām and Yazīd, Sulaymān's brothers, who "were satisfied and consented and swore allegiance". Thus Rajā' is reduced nearly to the role of a servant, rather than being the intimate adviser pictured in the Ta'rīkh. But the major departure here is the apparent pleasure of both Hishām and Yazīd at 'Umar's nomination; al-Ṭabarī has depicted Hishām as capitulating only after Rajā''s insistence that he must hold by his oath of allegiance to the unknown successor. Thus, al-Dīnawarī has added another small detail to the legends surrounding

1) Din, 332; Bosworth, op. cit., 60.

'Umar, implying that he was such a good and just man that everyone was greatly pleased at his succession to the caliphate, even those who had the most cause to dislike it. Al-Ṭabarī, on the other hand, chose to emphasize 'Umar's own unwillingness to become caliph as the perfect foil for Highām's great desire for the office in order to highlight the difference between 'Umar's pious nature and the greed of other members of the Banū Umayya.

The account of 'Umar's caliphate has been reduced by al-Dīnawarī to three short anecdotes illustrating 'Umar's justice and piety, the most important detail being his recovery of property from other Umayyads which they had acquired "by force" and his returning it to its rightful owners.¹ The aim is, unmistakably, to contrast 'Umar's attempts to govern justly with the oppressive policies of his predecessors and, by implication, of the Umayyad caliphs after him.

Significantly, al-Dīnawarī does not place the beginning of the 'Abbāsīd da'wa until the year 101, after 'Umar's death.² As we have seen, al-Ṭabarī seems to have dated it

1) Din, 333-34.

2) Din, 334. Cf. Petersen, 168; although al-Dīnawarī mentions no dates, the da'wa clearly belongs to the year 101, as the man whom he names as the 'āmil of Khurasan was appointed to that position by Maslama b. 'Abd al-Malik after 'Umar's death.

to the year 100 in order to imply that even a man of 'Umar's stature was incapable of preventing the revolution which ultimately placed the 'Abbāsids in power. Al-Dīnawarī, on the other hand, gives the impression that it was the reversion of the caliphate to the more tyrannical members of the Umayyad house that led to the beginnings of this movement.

The first siege of Baghdad

Al-Dīnawarī's account of the siege of Baghdad and its aftermath, a period of nearly eight years, covers only one page of the printed text.¹ It is entirely concerned with al-Amīn's attempt to escape, and his capture and death at the hands of Ṭāhir, written in a very concise and straightforward manner. He entirely ignores the aftermath of the siege, al-Ma'mūn's proclamation of 'Alī al-Riḍā as his successor, the revolt at Baghdad and proclamation of Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī as caliph, 'Alī's death, and the capitulation of the rebels in Baghdad; he passes directly from al-Amīn's death to al-Ma'mūn's entry into Baghdad.

It is not as though these incidents were not without interest for al-Dīnawarī; concerned with the history of the eastern provinces as he is, they are in fact of some importance. However, these events occur at the very end of the book; and it must be remembered that they took place only eighty years before al-Dīnawarī's death and probably

1) Din, 395-96.

shortly before his birth. It is quite common for the early Islamic historical writer to record very briefly and uninformatively the events of his own lifetime; perhaps al-Dīnawarī felt that it would be imprudent for him to write much on these events. Moreover, it is precisely at this time when the first semi-autonomous dynasties appear in the eastern provinces; Yāqūt tells us that al-Dīnawarī's patron was the brother of the caliph al-Mu'tamid.¹ Dependent upon such a man, it would hardly have been wise for him to record the loss of a great part of the empire.

* * * * *

The superficial similarities between the al-Akḥbār al-Ṭiwāl and the Ta'rīkh do not hide the fact that they are really quite different. The first thing which one notices is the attempt by al-Dīnawarī to systematize his material and make it coherent; by dispensing with isnāds, his task was made much simpler and permitted him to write a sustained narrative. Al-Ṭabarī, on the other hand, by adhering to the traditional technique, sacrificed clarity in his attempt to designate his sources, often using akḥbār which repeat the same material with little or no variation.

Secondly, al-Dīnawarī has much less emphasis on names and, particularly, dates than al-Ṭabarī. Often the reader is forced to guess a date through the placement of material or from previous knowledge of the event; if we accept that

1) Yqt I, 125.

one of al-Ṭabarī's reasons for devoting so much space to a discussion of an exact date was that dating was still considered a function of the mu'arrikh, then al-Dīnawarī would scarcely qualify as an historian. As mentioned above, it may be that he was more concerned with writing a work which emphasized literary and entertaining qualities, and this would certainly explain his lack of concern with dating an event even to a certain month and year. Certainly, from the list of his works found in Ibn al-Nadīm, history would appear to have been a secondary interest for him.

One must also consider the question of whether the al-Akḥbār al-Ṭiwāl can be really considered to belong to the same class of work as the Ta'rīkh. The aims and intents of the authors were apparently much different, if one accepts the above interpretation of al-Dīnawarī's purpose. While both works begin with the Creation and continue through Islamic times, the subject matter of both converges only when al-Ṭabarī discusses matter directly relevant to the Persian provinces; it is true that the eastern districts are his main interest, but these include Syria and Iraq, whereas al-Dīnawarī has little on these two provinces. Perhaps it should be reconsidered whether the al-Akḥbār al-Ṭiwāl belongs to the genre of universal history at all, with the great emphasis on Persian history in it; this is not to say that the Ta'rīkh should be taken as an example of that class either, but it certainly includes a wider scope than the former.

Aḥmad b. Abī Ya'qūb al-Ya'qūbī
and the Ta'rīkh al-Ya'qūbī

Aḥmad b. Abī Ya'qūb, known as al-Ya'qūbī, was apparently born in the northern or eastern provinces of the Islamic empire; he spent his youth in Armenia and then in the service of the Ṭāhirids of Khurasan, and after the fall of that dynasty he removed to Egypt, where he died in 284. In addition to his Ta'rīkh, he is best known for his Kitāb al-Buldān, a geographical description of the Islamic empire, India, China, and Byzantium, part of which survives today.¹

The Ta'rīkh al-Ya'qūbī was planned on similar lines to the Ta'rīkh of al-Ṭabarī; it follows the history of the patriarchs of Israel and of Jesus, then gives accounts of the various ancient nations (most of which are not mentioned by al-Ṭabarī), ending with the pre-Islamic Arabs. The second part is devoted to Islamic history from the birth of the Prophet to 259. After Muḥammad's death, this section is arranged according to the reigns of the caliphs, each of which begin with full astrological details of the positions of the planets and end with the names of the people who led the ḥajj each year and the fuqahā' who were active during that time. Only 'Alī's reign is called khilāfa, all others

1) M.J. de Goeje ed., Kitab al-buldān auctore . . . al-Ja'kūbī (Leiden, 1892). On the author, see Yqt II, 156; GAL I, 258-60, SI, 405; C. Brockelmann, "al-Ya'kūbī", EI IV, 1152-53.

being entitled ayyām; a section is given to each of the first eight and the tenth imām of the Twelver Shī'a under the year of his death. Al-Ya'qūbī rarely indicates his authorities for each khabar; instead he lists them at the beginning of the second part of his Ta'rīkh, in no apparent order.¹

Dhū Qār

Al-Ya'qūbī devotes only a few lines to this incident, placing it some four or five months after the battle between the Prophet and Quraysh at Badr.² He states that the war cry of Rabī'a during the fight was, "Yā Muḥammad! Yā Muḥammad!", and then quotes the saying of the Prophet about his having aided the Arabs. Thus it would seem that al-Ya'qūbī attaches little importance to this incident other than its value as an example of the Prophet's growing influence among the Arab tribes.

Badr

The account of Badr in the Ta'rīkh al-Ya'qūbī is also quite short; it agrees in essentials with the account in

1) Yqbi II, 3; William G. Millward, "Al-Ya'qūbī's Sources and the Question of Shī'a Partiality", Abr Nahrain XII (1971-2), 47-74, has shown that, while al-Ya'qūbī makes use of many of the sources employed by al-Ṭabarī, he gave more space proportionately to traditions deriving from members of the 'Alid family and their adherents.

2) Yqbi II, 39.

the Ta'rikh, although al-Ya'qūbī gives an entirely different date for the battle.¹ The leaders of Quraysh are given in a rather curious way; they are listed along with the number of animals they slaughtered each day to feed their men. Al-Ṭabarī reports from Ibn Ishāq that the Prophet deduced the number of Quraysh after learning how many beasts were needed to feed them; al-Ya'qūbī, however, mentions nothing of this and implies that each section of Quraysh, not the entire party, slaughtered nine or ten animals a day. The number of men with Muḥammad is given as three hundred, with no mention of the comparison to the number of Saul's companions which is given so much space in al-Ṭabarī. Furthermore, the battle itself is not described, and it is really only by implication that one knows it to have taken place.

The largest part of this section is devoted to al-'Abbās b. 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib. Al-Ya'qūbī lists him as one of the leaders of Quraysh; however, he implies that he did not take part in the actual fighting, but was taken prisoner in the Meccan camp, where he was supervising the slaughtering of animals. Al-Ya'qūbī then gives the same version as al-Ṭabarī, although in an edited and re-arranged form; of al-'Abbās ransoming himself and converting to Islam; he makes no mention of al-'Abbās having converted prior to this, and adds that he returned to Mecca "concealing his conversion". Thus, it would seem that al-Ya'qūbī, while not attempting

1) Yqbi II, 36-39.

to give al-'Abbās primacy in Islam by mentioning an earlier conversion, is nonetheless rather favourably disposed toward him; his statement that al-'Abbās was taken prisoner while apparently overseeing arrangements for feeding the Meccans may be seen as an attempt to remove from him the stigma of having actually fought against the Prophet, and his use of the Prophet's saying that he was kept awake by al-'Abbās groaning in his shackles gives the impression that Muḥammad felt it wrong for his uncle to be a prisoner.

Ṣiffīn

The battle at Ṣiffīn, the arbitration, and the secession of the Khawārij in the Ta'rīkh al-Ya'qūbī is greatly compressed, and is quite explicitly a pro-'Alid account. Al-Ya'qūbī emphasizes that 'Alī's followers included great numbers of Anṣār, Muhājirūn, and veterans from Badr, whereas only two of the Anṣār fought with Mu'āwiya; he even states that the purposes for which 'Alī's men were fighting were pure (ṣadaqat).¹ 'Alī is depicted as having the best interests of the community at heart; he agrees to the arbitration only through fear that his supporters will otherwise be divided, and his speech to the Khawārij is a model of determination to treat them fairly and patiently and to answer all their charges.²

In contrast, Mu'āwiya is not the passive figure met with in al-Ṭabarī, but a rather vengeful man hungry for power.

1) Yqbi II, 177.

2) Yqbi II, 178, 181-82.

When 'Alī asks that his army be allowed access to the river, Mu'āwiya angrily replies, "God did not let me or Abū Sufyān drink from the tank of His messenger".¹ After the initial fighting in Dhū al-Ḥijja, 'Alī tries to make peace, but Mu'āwiya wishes only to fight; there is no mention anywhere of the oft-repeated excuse offered by Mu'āwiya in the Ta'rīkh, that he only sought revenge for 'Uṭhmān's murder. Although 'Amr b. al-'Āṣ is still the author of the strategem to stop the fighting and is responsible for tricking Abū Mūsā at the arbitration, his part is not so outstanding here, and the blame for the entire incident is shifted more to Mu'āwiya.² Al-Ash'ath b. Qays is also given a share of the blame; he agrees to the demand for arbitration because he has been suborned by Mu'āwiya, and he also agrees to having 'Alī's title erased from the arbitration agreement.³

Furthermore, al-Ya'qūbī minimises the number of 'Alī's men who follow al-Ash'ath in agreeing to the arbitration; he mentions only the Yemeni troops. Presumably these are also included among the Khawārij, a term which he uses conspicuously earlier than al-Ṭabarī, although there is not even an attempt to identify the constituent elements anywhere. Both secessions of the Khawārij are dealt with after the failure of the arbitration agreement, thus giving the reader the impression that 'Alī's supporters have remained

1) Yqbi II, 177.

2) Yqbi II, 178, 179.

3) Yqbi II, 178.

largely undivided until that moment. 'Alī quite clearly states that the Khawārij are unbelievers because they have abandoned him.¹

Al-Ya'qūbī, then, has written the history of this conflict with great sympathy for 'Alī; while not assigning superhuman qualities to him, at the same time his enemies have hardly any redeeming features. Perhaps the most notable feature of this section, even of the entire work, is the tremendous amount of editing and re-arrangement which he has done with material found in other sources such as the Ta'rīkh; he has altered some of the material so drastically that it is barely identifiable and, furthermore, loses a great deal of the original sense, so that the entire section becomes very episodic and has little continuity.² In fact, there are times when his information can only be understood by a reader already familiar with other accounts of the same event. In this, if in no other way, al-Ya'qūbī differs greatly from al-Ṭabarī; his purpose is not so much to inform as to interpret, and by combining his akhbār into a single narrative he can achieve this aim.

The caliphate of 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz

The succession crisis and the beginning of 'Umar's reign follows al-Ṭabarī very closely, and would indicate

1) Yqbi II, 180-82.

2) Petersen, 170-71, discusses one case of such drastic alteration.

that both authors used the same source, al-Wāqidī.¹ Again, we find a much condensed version of 'Umar's problems with the 'āmils of Khurasan, a situation to which al-Ṭabarī devotes a large proportion of his account; but the two versions generally agree. It is interesting to note that al-Ya'qūbī does not mention that 'Umar withdrew the Muslim forces under Maslama from the siege of Constantinople; in fact, he gives the opposite impression by saying that 'Umar sent supplies to Maslama, which is actually only the first half of the report as given in al-Ṭabarī.²

The major break with the account in the Ta'rīkh begins with the report of the death of 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, Zayn al-'Ābidīn, which is not mentioned by al-Ṭabarī.³ Al-Ya'qūbī reports some of 'Alī's virtues and anecdotes about his piety, such as his reciting one thousand rak'as every morning and evening and the scars left on his shoulders from carrying food to the poor; there follows a khabar about 'Umar writing to 'Alī's son Muḥammad, who replies with a warning for 'Umar not to follow Sulaymān's example or he will be known as a tyrant. This gives an impression that Muḥammad b. 'Alī is to be counted as one of 'Umar's advisers and one whose advice was taken to heart, for the next khabar relates that 'Umar attempted to set right some of the injustices which the Umayyads had done; the emphasis

1) Yqbi III, 44-46; Bosworth, op. cit., 60.

2) Yqbi III, 46-47.

3) Yqbi III, 47-49.

on his treatment of the 'Alids is continued with the mention of his ordering that 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib not be cursed in the khutba, which had been common practice, and his returning the five wells at Fadak to 'Alī's descendants by Fāṭima, which he considered to be rightfully theirs. Later in this section, the reader is again given the impression that 'Umar regards the 'Alids as just and pious men; al-Zuhrī tells 'Umar how 'Alī handled a similar problem, and 'Umar does the same.¹

The rest of this account is taken up with illustrations of 'Umar's wisdom and good character. Thus, when Rajā' tells him that he spends too much time talking with his advisers and intimates, 'Umar replies:

The conversations of men are conceived for their friends. Advice and debate are the door to mercy and the key to blessings; with these two, thoughts will never stray nor resolution waver.²

Al-Ya'qūbī tells us that 'Umar did not wish to live in the mansions built by other Umayyads because they had been subsidised "with the wealth of God and the tribute [fay'] of the Muslims".³ One of the last akhbār in this account says that 'Umar would have liked to have appointed his own successor, but was bound by the terms of Sulaymān's testament to accept Yazīd; the implication, of course, is that 'Umar

1) Yqbi III, 49-50, 51.

2) Yqbi III, 50.

3) Yqbi III, 51.

knows that the latter will not be a good ruler.¹ Perhaps, too, this may be a subtle criticism of 'Umar, for if he really had the interests of the umma at heart, he would have tried to ensure that a man of justice succeed him, even though the opposition of the other Umayyads would have made this difficult.

It should also be noted that al-Ya'qūbī, like al-Ṭabarī, dates the beginning of the 'Abbāsid da'wa to the year 100.² However, this is one of the last items mentioned in this section, and loses much of its impact because it is not as strategically placed as the account in the Ta'rīkh. Perhaps al-Ya'qūbī felt that there was no conclusion to be drawn, but only includes it as a piece of information.

The overall impression of 'Umar which one gains from this account is of a good and pious man, whose deeds and justice place him apart from the other Umayyad caliphs but which, at the same time, do not necessarily make him the best man of his time. The account of 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn's character is much more glowing and commendatory than the rather piecemeal impression of 'Umar's; the akhbār emphasizing his righting wrongs done to the 'Alids and following 'Alī's example give the impression that 'Umar felt them to be the "first family" of Islam who should be honoured and emulated. We have seen that al-Ṭabarī may have used 'Umar's character to show that no man of whatever greatness could stem the

1) Yqbi III, 52.

2) Yqbi III, 52.

tide of the 'Abbāsīd advance; it would seem that al-Ya'qūbī may be attempting to demonstrate that even the best of the Umayyads does not particularly compare to the representatives of 'Alī's family.

The first siege of Baghdad

This is a very short section which agrees in outline with the account in the Ta'rīkh.¹ The one noticeable difference is that al-Ya'qūbī reports that al-Amīn imprisoned Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī and Sulaymān b. Abī Ja'far for some offense and released them when Harthama captured all the quarters around the citadel, sending them to the latter with those of the Banū Hāshim who wished al-Amīn to surrender. The implication is that Ibrāhīm may have been one of the spokesmen for this group. Al-Ṭabarī, on the other hand, gives the impression that Ibrāhīm remained with al-Amīn out of personal loyalty; this could then be utilized later, when Ibrāhīm is proclaimed caliph in Baghdad, to show that he was a misguided follower of a deposed caliph.

It should also be noted that al-Ya'qūbī, like al-Ṭabarī, refers to al-Amīn as Muḥammad, while giving al-Ma'mūn his regnal title. Although it would be foolhardy to infer much from this, especially as the account in the Ta'rīkh al-Ya'qūbī is so short, there is one idea which may be suggested. Al-Ya'qūbī seems to have written his work while at the Ṭāhirid court in Khurasan; perhaps, then this denial

1) Yqbi III, 176-77.

of al-Amīn's title was meant to confirm that al-Ma'mūn, whose favour Ṭāhir himself had enjoyed - at least until he had al-Amīn killed - was the rightful caliph. This might also suggest a vindication of Ṭāhir; if al-Amīn was not caliph at the time of his death, then it could be said that Ṭāhir had merely rid al-Ma'mūn of an enemy.

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The Ta'rīkh al-Ya'qūbī is much more similar in concept and scope to the Ta'rīkh than is al-Dīnawarī's al-Akḥbār al-Ṭiwāl, in that al-Ya'qūbī included material on many of the ancient nations in addition to Persia, it may be said that his work approaches the idea of an universal history more nearly than that of al-Ṭabarī. Apart from this, the main difference between the two would seem to be a religio-political one; al-Ṭabarī is writing from an orthodox stand, whereas al-Ya'qūbī apparently belongs to one of the Shī'ī sects.

The real problem lies in determining what sort of Shī'ī al-Ya'qūbī may have been.¹ Brockelmann has stated that he

1) Petersen, 169-74, has attempted to show that al-Ya'qūbī, like the three contemporaries, al-Balādhurī, al-Dīnawarī and al-Ṭabarī, was trying to compromise between orthodox and moderate Shī'ī views; his conclusion that the principal importance of these four authors is in their "very attempts to find a compromise that might unite all moderate forces against the radical tendencies ..." seems unfounded.

belonged to the moderate Mūsāwī sect, one of those who accepted Mūsā al-Qāzīm as the last imām; he apparently derives this from the fact that al-Ya'qūbī mentions the first eight imāms and thus places him in one of the groups which reverted to Mūsā after the death of 'Alī al-Riḍā.¹ However, since the tenth imām is mentioned by al-Ya'qūbī and since his Ta'rīkh ends the year before the death of the eleventh, it would seem possible that his section on Muḥammad al-Jawād has been lost.² Marquet has suggested that al-Ya'qūbī may have deliberately stopped with the year 259 to avoid mentioning the eleventh imām; and that

cont'd:- Petersen attaches great importance to the emergence of extremist Shī'ī groups during this period; it is hard to believe that this would immediately send scholars to search for a compromise when other crises in the past, which would have seemed just as dangerous to the people of the time, had not produced such activity. Furthermore, it should be remembered that al-Dīnawarī and al-Ya'qūbī lived at a time when Khārijism would have seemed a more serious threat; al-Ṭabarī would have seen much more activity on the part of the Ismā'īlīs, but this would probably have encouraged him to become even more orthodox in his views, rather than leading him to seek a compromise with any group whom he would have considered heretics. Cf. Khalidi, 127-28.

1) Brockelmann, "al-Ya'qūbī", op. cit., 1152.

2) Yqbi III, 259.

this may indicate that he, like many other Shī'ī sympathizers of the time, was confused by the proliferation of groups, each of which accepted a different imām as the last or followed a different branch of the family, and was uncertain where his own allegiance might lie.¹

However, it seems quite certain that al-Ya'qūbī was writing from a moderate Shī'ī point of view; his Ta'rīkh, then, might be viewed as the reverse side of a coin the obverse of which is al-Ṭabarī's massive work. The crudity of the former when compared with the latter need not necessarily downgrade its worth; the value of such an early work which attempts to place Islam in the world order from a Shī'ī point of view far outweighs any defects it may have.

'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī al-Mas'ūdī
and the Murūj al-Dhahab

Al-Mas'ūdī, the last of our authors, is a slightly

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- 1) Yves Marquet, "Le Šī'isme au IX^e siècle à travers l'histoire de Ya'qūbī", Arabica XIX (1972), 136-37. He goes on to say (133) that he feels the author to be a fanatic Shī'ī, which he then qualifies: "le caractère polémique est dans son oeuvre plus prononcée que dans aucun autre ouvrage historique contemporain". One would like to know what works he had in mind which could make al-Ya'qūbī's seem so extreme; certainly not al-Ṭabarī nor al-Balādhurī, and even al-Dīnawarī, who has sometimes been called a Shī'ī, would not appear to belong to that category.

younger contemporary of al-Ṭabarī. Almost nothing is known of his life; he was probably born in Iraq, and died in 345 or 346. He apparently spent the greater part of his life travelling, and used the knowledge gained from people whom he met throughout the Islamic world in his many works. He was among the first Muslim historical writers to reflect on the value and technique of history, and applied to history a "scientific" method based on the natural sciences and Indian and Greek philosophy; a recent study has suggested that his work laid the foundation for later philosophical historians such as Ibn Khaldūn.

Al-Mas'ūdī composed several historical works, most of which have unfortunately been lost; he frequently refers to his other works in the Murūj, which may have been an abridgement of two much larger works.¹

The Murūj al-Dhahab was one of his later works, finished in 332; its design is that of the universal history: it begins with the Creation, proceeds to the history of various ancient nations, and then follows Islamic history down to his own time. Al-Mas'ūdī occasionally gives isnāds in the Islamic section; he generally dispenses with naming his authorities, but those found in other works seem to be faithfully recorded. The section on the Prophet's life is mainly

1) Khalidi, 28-54. On the author, see IN, 154; Yqt V, 147-49; C. Brockelmann, "al-Mas'ūdī", EI III, 403-04; GAL I, 150-52, SI, 220-21; Sezgin, 332-36; Mas I, iii-vii.

straightforward information with little embellishment of explanation; 'Alī appears as a prominent character, which is in line with al-Mas'ūdī's Shī'ī views.

Dhū Qār

The account of this battle is divided into two sections.¹ The first is a short account which appears under the reign of Kistrā Abrawīz; the Prophet is quoted, as in the Ta'rīkh, and various dates are mentioned for the battle. The second account occurs in the section on the kings of Hira, and explains the reason for the battle; this follows the account found in al-Ṭabarī, with one or two minor embellishments, such as Kistrā ordering al-Nu'mān to be flung under the feet of female elephants. While shortened and edited, the account in the Murūj agrees with that in the Ta'rīkh, and is clearly taken either from the latter or from the same sources; there is no mention of the raiding of Bakr b. Wā'il, and the direct cause of the battle is Kistrā's demand for al-Nu'mān's inheritance which was left with the Banū Shaybān. Both sections end with the remark that the incident has been dealt with in the al-Kitāb al-Awsaṭ; this statement will be met with throughout the Murūj, referring the reader to an apparently more detailed account of which this is only a summary, perhaps the akhbār which al-Mas'ūdī felt to be the truest or which agreed with his own attitudes.

1) Mas II, 227-28; III, 204-09.

Ṣiffīn

While agreeing in outline with the section in the Ta'rīkh, the account in the Murūj of the fighting at Ṣiffīn, the arbitration, and the secession of the Khawārij, differs in certain details which change the overall depiction of these events. Al-Mas'ūdī begins by making the fight for access to the Euphrates the only conflict before a truce is declared; the truce lasts throughout Dhū al-Ḥijja and Muḥarram; and all the various battles between different sections of the two armies are fought on consecutive days in Ṣafar.¹ This may represent an attempt to arrange this material in a logical order - we have already remarked on the confusion of the account in the Ta'rīkh - even though al-Mas'ūdī seems to be using Abū Mikhnaf's account in places. While the reports of the call to arbitration and the events before the actual arbitration are very similar to those employed by al-Ṭabarī, al-Mas'ūdī emphasizes that al-Ash'ath was most insistent on accepting the Syrians' offer and that there was a great deal of dissension among 'Alī's followers both before and after the arbitration document was written.² He does not mention that 'Alī was compelled to have his title Amīr al-Mu'minīn erased from the agreement, which suggests an attempt to cover the fact that 'Alī was thus reduced to the level of any ordinary man and made an equal of Mu'āwiya.

1) Mas IV, 344-78.

2) Mas IV, 378-90.

The account of the arbitration meeting is given in three alternative versions: the first very long and much elaborated, the second shorter and apparently from Abū Mikhnaf, the third very short.¹ The first account would seem to be the one which al-Mas'ūdī finds preferable, and certainly it bolsters the general depiction found elsewhere of the main characters. Abū Mūsā emerges as a vain man very easily tricked by 'Amr b. al-'Āṣ; 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abbās, whose role in this conflict is noticeably subordinate, is the faithful retainer of 'Alī; 'Amr b. al-'Āṣ is crafty and lies to Abū Mūsā, thereby winning the day for Mu'āwiya.

Above all, it is Mu'āwiya who becomes the arch-rebel and power-hungry villain; earlier, he has refused to allow 'Alī's army access to the Euphrates despite 'Amr's willingness to conciliate, and in one version of the account of 'Alī's challenge to Mu'āwiya for single combat, the latter compels 'Amr to take his place. Before the meeting of the arbitrators, Mu'āwiya counsels 'Amr to deal carefully with Abū Mūsā, so that 'Amr's deceit is implied to have been inspired by Mu'āwiya. Finally, after the failure of the arbitration, al-Mas'ūdī reports that 'Amr felt himself able to manipulate Mu'āwiya and refuses his summons; Mu'āwiya, however, tricks the former into a position where he is vulnerable and forces him to swear an oath of allegiance to him as caliph.² It would seem that the sole

1) Mas IV, 390-402.

2) Mas IV, 403-06.

purpose of this story is to emphasize Mu'āwiya's thoroughly bad character; at the same time, it also denigrates 'Amr and makes him a less formidable man than might be supposed from his performance at the arbitration.

'Alī, on the other hand, is a hero fighting for the truth; his failure is entirely due to circumstances beyond his control and the disobedience of his supporters. His quest for justice includes waiting many years to punish 'Ubayd Allāh b. 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb for the unprovoked murder of al-Hurmuzān; he is a formidable fighter, killing five hundred and twenty three men in a single day and night, one man with every stroke of his blade; he is a learned man, quoting with ease both the Qur'ān and poetry. His followers include great numbers of Anṣār, Muhājirūn, and veterans of Badr, and he himself rides the mule of the Prophet.

The entire account is thus a vindication of 'Alī and a justification for his failure. Beyond all doubt, Mu'āwiya is a self-seeking rebel who will use any deceit to further his ambition; it is even implied that he commands the allegiance of his own supporters only through fear and force and that he trusts no one. The difference between al-Mas.'ūdī's account and that of al-Ṭabarī could hardly be greater; whereas the latter attempts to blur Mu'āwiya's role and the dissension among 'Alī's followers - while giving 'Alī a clear-cut and honourable role - the former draws the distinctions sharply and leaves the reader with no doubt in his mind as to his view of the conflict.

The caliphate of 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz

Since al-Mas'ūdī depicted Mu'āwiya as a rebel against 'Alī it can hardly be hoped that he would deal with the Umayyad caliphs in a generous manner. He accords only 'Umar the dignity of the title caliph, referring to the reigns of the other Umayyads as ayyām. The section on 'Umar's caliphate is filled with anecdotes of his great piety and humility, as opposed to his predecessors whose injustice and personal vices are a recurring theme.¹

Al-Mas'ūdī gives a different version of the succession crisis than any of the other authors we have examined. Sulaymān makes the decision to name 'Umar as his successor, but tells no one; he gives his testament to Rajā', al-Zuhrī, and Makḥūl with instructions to read it to the people only after his death. Rajā' makes only this one appearance; the reading of the document is done by the two scholars. Like al-Ṭabarī, al-Mas'ūdī emphasizes 'Umar's unwillingness to accept the office; but in the Murūj, Yazīd b. 'Abd al-Malik is the first to swear allegiance to his cousin, whereas Hishām delays for two days and then capitulates only when it is apparent that everyone else is satisfied with the new caliph.

The rest of this section is given over entirely to anecdotes about 'Umar's character, with one short digression on the various sects of Islam. While al-Mas'ūdī mentions

1) Mas I, 416-45.

that 'Umar forbade the cursing of 'Alī from the minbar and that he grants a large sum of money to the descendants of 'Alī and Fāṭima, these incidents are not emphasized and are merely illustrative of 'Umar's justice. 'Umar's desire to be a good ruler leads him to appoint 'āmils of good character, willing to follow his example and to advise him when he needs counsel; furthermore, he will take advice from any person, no matter how young or humble, if it will help him to be a pious Muslim and just man. His well-organized and logical argument even wins the hearts of two of the Khawārij. When news of his death is received at the Byzantine court, the Emperor recounts the stories he has heard of 'Umar's piety and merit, and tells a Muslim delegation not to weep for 'Umar but for themselves, since they have lost a ruler who was such a good man that he could live in this world as though he were a monk.

The first siege of Baghdad

The account of the siege of Baghdad in the Murūj is very similar to that in the Ta'rīkh; in many places the reports are exactly the same and much of the poetry is also found in both, which indicates either a common source or borrowing by al-Mas'ūdī from the Ta'rīkh.¹ The additional reports in the Murūj deal mainly with the severity of daily life in the city; al-Mas'ūdī devotes one section to a description of the organization and weapons of the "army" composed of the dregs of the populace, with vivid

1) Mas VI, 443-87.

depictions of men going forth to battle naked, carrying shields of tarred reeds and wearing helmets made from leaves of the cocoa tree. He compares this siege with the battles in the city during the year 332, but emphasizes that the people suffered more during the first siege.

Like al-Ṭabarī, al-Mas'ūdī refers to al-Amīn as Muḥammad, or more frequently as al-Makhlū', the deposed one; it has been suggested in a recent study that al-Mas'ūdī's attitudes to the 'Abbāsid caliphs was determined by each one's treatment of the 'Alids.¹ If we accept this, then it would seem that he denies al-Amīn his regnal title in order to emphasize al-Ma'mūn's right to the caliphate, since the latter showed great favour to the 'Alids a few years later.

* * * * *

Unlike the two authors discussed previously, al-Mas'ūdī generally is much more liberal with his dates; events in the Islamic section are usually dated to at least the month. He apparently discussed the disagreement among authorities about the date of a given incident in one of his other works, to which he often refers the reader. This suggests that he too, like al-Ṭabarī, may have felt that dating was one of the functions of the historical writer. Unlike the Ta'rīkh, however, there are sections of the Murūj devoted to determining the number of participants in an incident; whereas al-Ṭabarī often gives the number of people killed

1) Khalidi, 133-35.

in a battle, al-Mas'ūdī may ignore this in favour of a discussion about how difficult it is to determine the number of men at Šiffīn, for instance, because the dead were not always identified or some sources fail to mention someone whom another authority claims to have been present. Often he will simply state that x number of men took part, as he does when he reports that 100,000 men from the rabble of Baghdad fought in one battle against Ṭāhir's forces, and there does not seem to be any indication that he is sceptical of what certainly seems, to modern minds, a preposterously high figure.

Although the structure of the Murūj is similar to that of the Ta'rīkh, there is enough variation in subject matter for one to feel that al-Mas'ūdī's purpose in writing the work must have differed from al-Ṭabarī's. Khalidi states that al-Mas'ūdī indicates his opinion of the material he uses and, when faced with a choice between two or more versions of the same event, generally prefers the first; but he does not really explain how this was done.¹ If we accept his interpretation, then we find that al-Mas'ūdī apparently subscribes to a more elaborate or fanciful version than the other offered; for example, he would seem to find it more reasonable that al-Nu'mān died after being trampled by elephants on Kisrā's order than that he died in prison. When there is only one version of the account with no indication of al-Mas'ūdī's attitude, are we then to believe that with his dying breath al-Mirqāl drags himself

1) Khalidi, 7-10.

to the wounded 'Ubayd Allāh b. 'Umar and bites him? These are rather trivial details, but they do suggest an idea. Perhaps al-Mas'ūdī, with his wide knowledge of people gained through his travels, was attempting to combine two qualities in the Murūj - the informative function of an historical work with the entertainment value of literature. The two examples mentioned above could easily fit this theory; while both may be quite true and not at all fantastic, they embellish the story in such a way that it might appeal to a wider or different class of people than would the Ta'rīkh.

CHAPTER V

AL-ṬABARĪ AS AN HISTORIAN

Al-Ṭabarī's fame as an historian rests almost solely on the Ta'rīkh; and from the lists of his writings found in reference works, it would seem that this is the only work by him which we would call a history. It is, then, worth considering how the Ta'rīkh fits into the scheme of his interests and the general intellectual mood of the time, and to what extent later authors employed it in order to arrive at an appreciation of his place in Islamic historiography.

The majority of al-Ṭabarī's other works seem to have been concerned primarily with fiqh, with the explanation of the laws which had developed from the word of God as contained in the Qur'ān and which were meant to provide order and stability for His community of believers. The Tafsīr is an integral part of this interest, giving the commentaries of various authorities on the meaning of each verse, and, more importantly, on the historical situation in which the verses were revealed by God. The circumstances of each revelation would be important for the Islamic community; since the Qur'ān was meant to provide a basis for the laws of the umma, the various verses could be seen to apply to situations similar to those in which God revealed them. Thus, tafsīr would have a long-range import outside of its immediate goal of

explaining the word of God, in that it provided the means for the community and its leaders to be able to resolve any dilemma by an application of laws which had been clearly explained for them, and related to a historical situation.

It would seem that the Ta'rīkh may also have arisen out of this concern for the laws of the community; just as the Tafsīr would provide an explanation of the basis for its law, so would the Ta'rīkh give members of the umma an historical justification for that law and, thus, for their very existence. The incidents contained within the Ta'rīkh could be interpreted in the light of the later development of Islam and be seen to be a part of God's plan for His community; this would inspire confidence and hope for the future, that the umma would remain united and could look ahead, secure in the knowledge that it had not strayed from the path on which the Prophet had started it and for which God had intended it.

It is doubtful whether al-Ṭabarī would have thought of himself as an historian. Concerned as he was with formulating a code of living for society which would allow it to emulate the umma of the Prophet and to carry out his ideals, perhaps it would be closer to his own view of himself to call him a faqīh. It is interesting to note in this connection that Ibn al-Nadīm lists him not among historians or mufassirūn, but with the jurists; perhaps later Islamic society conceived of his Tafsīr and Ta'rīkh

as belonging to the realm of law, in the sense that they discussed problems vital to the establishment of those codes which stabilized society and gave it the means to deal with problems which arose out of the daily contact of its members. Al-Ṭabarī himself would probably have been pleased with being categorized as a jurist; he would have considered it a rare compliment to be acknowledged to have made a contribution, however small, to the laws governing the divinely ordained community of which he was a member.

As we have seen, the genre of historical writing known as universal or world history first appears during al-Ṭabarī's lifetime; the need for Islamic society to justify its existence and to explain it within the whole of human history demanded that historical writing become more comprehensive and cover more material than the basically monographic form which had hitherto been the most common structure of an historical work. It is in this setting that one must consider the Ta'rīkh to determine its place in Islamic historiography; it was not composed in a vacuum, but was written in response to certain social and intellectual developments of the age. The primary function of an history is to be meaningful to the people of its own time; the interpretation of past events is, to a large extent, formed by contemporary happenings and may be seen as the attempt to apologize for and justify the existing state of a society. The Ta'rīkh was a response not only

to earlier histories of its kind, but also to the condition of Islamic society in the late third century; at a time when the community seemed to be in danger of division, al-Ṭabarī attempted to give a measure of security to that community by showing that it had encountered crises before and survived, which meant that it was still holding to the precepts which God had laid down for it. The Ta'riḫ is an optimistic work in that sense, for al-Ṭabarī is confident that the umma will emerge from its present dilemma undivided and stronger for the future.

It is also within the context of this period that we must consider the charge of Shī'ism of which al-Ṭabarī has sometimes been accused. It is hard to believe that anyone who has read the Tafsīr or the Ta'riḫ could seriously give credence to such an accusation.¹ When one compares the latter with such histories of an 'Alid bias as the Ta'riḫ al-Ya'qūbī, it is immediately apparent how orthodox al-Ṭabarī was; he has virtually no information on the imāms or any of the proto-Shī'ī groups, mentioning them only when they have a direct connection with the affairs of the

1) Nūr al-Dā'im, op. cit., has shown that on points of tafsīr on which Shī'īs and Sunnīs differ, al-Ṭabarī always prefers the Sunnī interpretation. He has also pointed out that a contemporary of al-Ṭabarī, Muḥammad b. Jarīr b. Rustam al-Ṭabarī, was a Shī'ī author and that the similarity of the two names may have led to confusion between the two.

central government, such as their leading a rebellion. It would seem that such a charge may have grown out of the hatred which such ultra-conservative groups as the Ḥanbalites bore him; accusing one's enemy of being Shī'ī meant only that he did not agree with one's own views, and was one of the worst epithets which could be attached to his name. Ibn Ishāq was accused of 'Alid tendencies for daring to collect traditions about the Prophet against the wishes of the Medinese scholars, perhaps because they felt that such a collection might have given too much weight to Muḥammad's prophethood and not enough to his mortal qualities, thus making him seem semi-divine; it may be that certain segments of society in al-Ṭabarī's time felt that, since al-Ṭabarī's interpretation of history did not agree with theirs, it must support some other groups which they would have considered as deviating from the true path and thus to be condemned in terms which would clarify their own position as well as attach some term of contempt to al-Ṭabarī.

Al-Ṭabarī's Ta'rīkh has exercised great influence on later historians of Islam. It was to some extent utilized by Muslim historical writers such as Miskawayh and Ibn al-Athīr, who abridged and condensed the material in the Ta'rīkh, omitting the isnāds and variant versions of the same event and combining the akhbār into a continuous narrative; most later historians did, however, supplement this information with material from other sources. It would seem, then, that al-Ṭabarī was recognized

as a valuable source for the events of the early history of Islam without being given a pre-eminent position among the earlier historical writers.

It is mainly on modern historians of Islam that al-Ṭabarī's influence has been most pronounced. His superficial impartiality and use of large numbers of earlier historical writings have led many modern scholars to prefer the Ta'rīkh as a source over most other works of the same and later periods; furthermore, the soberness of his accounts, as compared to the more fanciful versions found in many other historians, lends an air of authenticity and truth to his work. His silence on certain subjects, while puzzling, has never really given rise to any doubts about his veracity or whether he was writing with a definite view and purpose in mind. It has been the intention of this study to show that we must treat al-Ṭabarī with the same circumspection as other sources, and that there is no foundation for considering him an "objective" historian. Al-Ṭabarī knew that by referring to as many authorities as possible, he could sufficiently confuse some readers to the point that they would see no indications of a definite view being put forth; furthermore, by utilizing so many sources, he could make it appear that he had summarized the most authoritative works on a single subject, thereby providing a reference work, as it were, for that vast majority of people who would not wish to read several different monographs on the same subject and then attempt

to understand which of these contradictory accounts would come the nearest to being correct. Al-Ṭabarī gives the appearance of having done exactly that. Hodgson has written:

It is no accident that it is only since the discovery of Ṭabarī's work (as Gibb pointed out) that modern historians have begun to be able to reconstruct the periods he dealt with. Ṭabarī meant it that way.¹

It is in this light that we must now re-evaluate our attitudes towards al-Ṭabarī and his place in Islamic historiography.

1) Hodgson, Venture of Islam, op. cit. I, 356-57, fn. 14.

CONCLUSION

History, as an intellectual and literary discipline, had a very practical purpose in a society such as that in which al-Ṭabarī lived and worked. It was not merely the explanation of the origins of the state such as then existed, but also a vindication of the authority which it sought to exercise in its laws and actions. While it would be futile to look for some explicit philosophy of history in the work of al-Ṭabarī, there can be no doubt that he conceived of his massive Ta'rīkh as a further contribution to the stability of his time. It may be deduced from this that there was in his mind an awareness of a divine causality guiding and shaping events so that the community of believers would not stray from its appointed path; and in this respect, al-Ṭabarī, though no doubt holding conceptions of the good and the ideal in social life, could not venture into an explicit criticism of events which were conceived as manifestations of God's will towards His inscrutable ends.

It is doubtful, however, whether a man such as al-Ṭabarī would have felt any need for such criticism; history, to him, was to be studied in order to learn the lessons that it might teach. Al-Ṭabarī was concerned with the history of the umma and its attempts to emulate the community of the Prophet and the Rāshidūn; the failures and successes of the umma in these attempts were the most important lessons to be learned from history. At an earlier

time, the community had been fortunate to have the advice of the Companions of the Prophet, who could counsel them in times of crisis as to what action should be taken; but since the end of the first century, the only direct link which remained from the paradigmatic umma, other than the Qur'ān and the traditions of the Prophet, was the khilāfa. The caliphate was the only organization of government which was conceivable to the community, for it was the form sanctioned by the Companions and, thus, implicitly by the Prophet. The community, therefore, had to look to the khalīfa for guidance, for he was the leader of the umma to whom it had sworn allegiance; his first duty was to help towards the attainment of the standards which the Prophet and the Rashidūn had formulated as being the best code of living for God's ordained community. Only by studying the history of the community and its leadership could one hope to avoid errors already committed and learn the solutions to many of the problems which had arisen in the past.

Al-Ṭabarī's Ta'rīkh, therefore, was written to provide his time with a catalogue of those mistakes which the community had committed and the correction of them. The only pattern which al-Ṭabarī would find in history was this constant searching by the umma for the correct ways in which to emulate the community of the Prophet and the Rashidūn; any other pattern of behaviour which might be apparent would be dismissed as adventitious, or could be

shown to be simply another manifestation of the pre-conceived pattern in his mind. For al-Ṭabarī's concept of history is indistinguishable from his concept of Islamic history. History was ordained by God; Islam was ordained by God; it was inconceivable that any history could exist in which the focal point was not the Islamic umma. All pre-Islamic history was merely the prelude to Islam, which is the final, and continuing, phase of history.

Historical writing at this time was still largely a matter of quoting one's sources verbatim and arranging these quotations in such a way that they would form a more or less continuous, coherent narrative. The deficiencies of such a system are especially apparent in the lack of what might be called a technical vocabulary, and much of the obscurity met with in both al-Ṭabarī and other contemporary sources arises from the variable notions associated with words which were later to be accepted in a specific sense. One of the values of a work such as the Ta'rīkh, which preserves and identifies the writings of earlier scholars, is that it gives modern scholars a basis for determining the early meanings of many terms and for tracing the development of these meanings throughout various periods; but in the sense that al-Ṭabarī and his colleagues had a fund of terms whose meanings were fixed to use for such things as describing the administration of a city or province, then one can say that no such vocabulary existed in quantity. Al-Ṭabarī and his contemporaries would have

had little trouble in understanding what various terms meant; it is only in later periods that any confusion would arise. Many terms, especially those concerned with administration, had been defined in a very narrow sense after al-Ṭabarī's time, and works such as al-Mawārdī's were meant to categorise and explain these meanings. To a man familiar with these strict definitions, the use of a word such as 'āmil in an early historical work could be puzzling and, if read with the familiar meaning, could lead to a complete misunderstanding of the text.

Such limitations of the method of historical writing adopted by early Islamic historical writers did not, however, prevent the author from achieving one purpose for his writing - the propagation of one particular view of an historical event; this view may be associated with a certain sect, region, or class, but it is always present in the writings of early authors. Historical "facts" as we conceive them today did not exist in these early writings, hence the large amount of space devoted by al-Ṭabarī to the conflicting accounts of the exact date of a certain incident. A fact to the early Islamic historian was any self-contained thought which he felt to be true and which supported his own point of view; it was not an opinion which could be independently verified, for such an idea would not occur to him. "Facts" were handed down from generation to generation in a theoretically oral form, and their veracity was attested by the isnāds attached to them.

Under such circumstances, objectivity in the modern sense was not only nearly impossible, but also undesirable. Islam was divinely ordained, and one could not be impartial about it, for this would imply unbelief. Objectivity to a man such as al-Ṭabarī would mean simply a whole-hearted belief in the rightness of his chosen doctrine; he may have examined others and rejected them as being deviations from the one true path, but he would not consider this as being objective or subjective, which are, after, western concepts. Similarly, his is not a voice of protest, nor would the notion of reform as it is understood today be expected in him. His proper stance is of the impartial and neutral witness of the past, though, as has been shown, it would have been humanly impossible for him to have entirely submerged his attitudes and conceptions within this impersonality and anonymity.

APPENDIX

The charts at the end of this thesis are a schematic representation of the isnāds given in the Ta'riḫ for the five events which are discussed in this work. Only those isnāds which give the name of a transmitter other than al-Ṭabarī himself are shown, and those which state "others say", "someone else said", "it is said", etc., have been omitted.

The Arabic word or words written immediately beneath the name of an authority are the verbs of transmission discussed in Chapter III. Passive verbs have been fully vocalized for easier identification.

Unless otherwise qualified, all dates indicate the year, or approximate year, of death of the transmitters, according to the hijrī calendar.

Solid lines are used to indicate a direct transmission according to al-Ṭabarī's rendering of the isnād. Dotted lines indicate that al-Ṭabarī quotes an authority without the intervening links which he gives elsewhere.

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Ziyād b. Khaṣafa

Zayd b. Badr al-'Abdī

Mihrān,
mawlā
Yazīd b. Hānī'

Yūnus b. Abī
Ishāq al-Sabī'i
(ca. 158)

al-Qāsim, mawlā,
Yazīd b. Mu'āwiya

'Abd Allāh b.
Yazīd b. Jābir al-Azdī

al-Muhill b.
Khalīfa al-Ṭā'i

Sa'd Abū
al-Mujāhid
al-Ṭā'i

'Abd Allāh
b. 'Awf b.
al-Aḥmar

Yūsuf b.
Yazīd

man of Al Khārija
b. al-Ṭamīmī

Abū Rawq
al-Hamdānī

Sinān

al-Nadr b.
Ṣālih Abū Zuhayr
al-'Absī

Yazīd b.
'Alqama

Jayfar b. Abī
al-Qāsim al-'Abdī

Muhammad b.
Mikhnaf

Yahyā b.
Sā'id
Abū Abī Mikhnaf

al-Hudayn b.
al-Mundhir
(ca. 100)

Suwayd b.
Ḥayya al-
Asadī

'Abd al-Rahmān
b. 'Ubayd Abū
al-Kunūd

Sulaymān b.
Rāghid al-Azdī

'Abd al-Malik b.
Abī Hurra
al-Ḥanāfī

man of al-
Fā'ish

'Abd Allāh b. 'Asim
['Amir] al-Fā'ishī

al-Hurr b.
al-Ṣayyāh al-Nakha'i

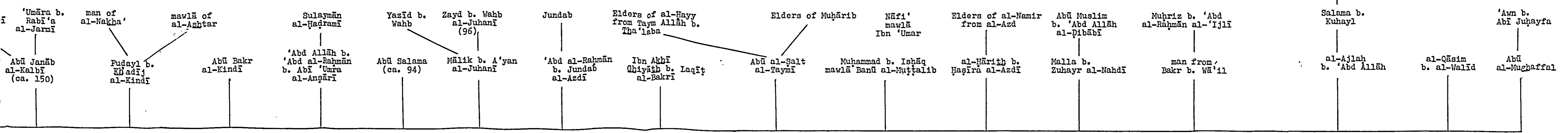
Abū Zayd
'Abd Allāh
al-Awdī

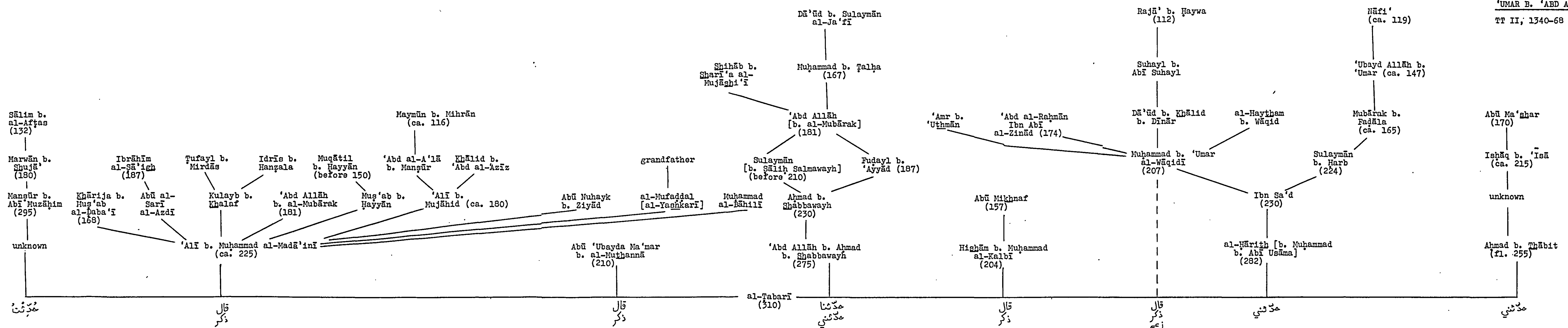
'Umāra b.
Rabī'a
al-Jarmī

Abū Janāb
al-Kalbī
(ca. 150)

man of
al-Nakha'

Fudayl
Khādī,
al-Kinā





'A'isha
(58)

'Urwa b. al-Zubayr
(ca. 95)

Ibrāhīm b.
'Abd al-Rahmān
(ca. 95)

Sa'd b.
Ibrāhīm
(ca. 126)

'Abd al-Wāhid
b. Abī 'Awn
(144)

Muhammad b. Ishāq
(ca. 150)

Salama b. al-Faḍl
(191)

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(248)

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al-Tabarī
(310)

'Ubāda b.
al-Sāmit
(34)

Abū Umāma
al-Bāhilī
(ca. 81)

Makhūl [b. Abī
Muslīm al-Dimashqī]
(ca. 115)

men from
Banū
Salama

unknown

Sulaymān b. Mūsā
al-Ashdaq (ca. 115)

'Abd al-Rahmān
b. al-Harīth
(143)

Anas b.
Mālik (ca. 91)

Humayd
al-Tawīl
(142)

'Abd Allāh
b. Abī Najīh
(ca. 131)

'Abd Allāh
b. Mas'ūd
(ca. 32)

men from
Banū
Makhzūm

Shaykhs of
the Anṣār

Nubayh
b. Wahb
(126)

Abū Dā'ūd
al-Māzanī

men from
Banū Māzan b
al-Najjār

Ishāq b.
Yāsār

Abū 'Ubayda
b. Muḥammad

'Aṣim b.
'Umar b.
Qatāda (ca. 120)

'Abd Allāh b.
Tha'laba b. Ṣu'ayr
al-'Udhri (ca. 87)

al-Zuhrī
(124)

Muḥammad b.
Jā'far b.
al-Zubayr
(ca. 115)

Yazīd b.
Rūmān
(130)

The transmission through
Muhammad b. Ishāq

TT I, 1281-1359

