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The History of Al-Tabari  
An Annotated Translation

Volume XXVI

*The Waning of the Umayyad Caliphate*

Prelude to Revolution

A.D. 738-745 / A.H. 121-127

The History of al-Tabari

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The History of al-Tabari  
(*Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l-muluk*)

Volume XXVI

The Waning of the Umayyad Caliphate

translated and annotated  
by  
Carole Hillenbrand

University of Edinburgh

State University of New York Press

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## PREFACE

The History of Prophets and Kings (*Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'lmuluk*) by Abu Jacfar Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari (839-923), here rendered as the *History of al-Tabari*, is by common consent the most important universal history produced in the world of Islam. It has been translated here in its entirety for the first time for the benefit of non-Arabists, with historical and philological notes for those interested in the particulars of the text.

Tabari's monumental work explores the history of the ancient nations, with special emphasis on biblical peoples and prophets, the legendary and factual history of ancient Iran, and, in great detail, the rise of Islam, the life of the Prophet Muhammad, and the history of the Islamic world down to the year 915. The first volume of this translation will contain a biography of al-Tabari and a discussion of the method, scope, and value of his work. It will also provide information on some of the technical considerations that have guided the work of the translators.

The *History* has been divided here into thirty-eight volumes, each of which covers about two hundred pages of the original Arabic text in the Leiden edition. An attempt has been made to draw the dividing lines between the individual volumes in such a way that each is to some degree independent and can be read as such. The page numbers of the original in the Leiden edition appear on the margins of the translated volumes.

Al-Tabari very often quotes his sources verbatim and traces the chain of transmission (*isnad*) to an original source. The chains of transmitters are, for the sake of brevity, rendered by only a dash

() between the individual links in the chain. Thus, according to Ibn Humayd Salamah Ibn Ishaq means that al-Tabari received the report from Ibn Humayd who said that he was told by Salamah, who said that he was told by Ibn Ishaq, and so on. The numerous subtle and important differences in the original Arabic wording have been disregarded.

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

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

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

The annotation aims chiefly at clarifying difficult passages, identifying individuals and place names, and discussing textual difficulties. Much leeway has been left to the translators to include in the footnotes whatever they consider necessary and helpful.

The bibliographies list all the sources mentioned in the annotation.

The index in each volume contains all the names of persons and places referred to in the text, as well as those mentioned in the notes as far as they refer to the medieval period. It does not include the names of modern scholars. A general index, it is hoped, will appear after all the volumes have been published.

For further details concerning the series and acknowledgments, see Preface to Volume I.

EHSAN YAR-SHATER

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## ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Arch. Or.:</i>	<i>Archiv Orientální</i>
<i>BEO:</i>	<i>Bulletin d'Etudes Orientales de l'Institut Français de Damas</i>
<i>EI1:</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia of Islam, first edition.</i>
<i>EI2:</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia of Islam, second edition.</i>
<i>JA:</i>	<i>Journal Asiatique</i>
<i>JESHO:</i>	<i>Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient</i>
<i>JHS:</i>	<i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i>
<i>JSS:</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
<i>RSO:</i>	<i>Rivista degli studi orientali</i>
<i>SI:</i>	<i>Studia Islamica</i>

## TRANSLATOR'S FOREWORD

The years 121-26 (738-44), which are covered in this volume, saw the outbreak of savage internecine struggles between members of the ruling Umayyad family in Syria. Once the towering figures of the Umayyad caliph Hisham, presented in the sources as a most able if somewhat unattractive and parsimonious figure, and his redoubtable governor in Iraq, Khalid al-Qasri, had died, the process of decay at the center of Umayyad power, the ruling family itself, was swift and devastating. Al-Walid II, his cousin Yazid b. al-Walid and Yazid's brother Ibrahim all ruled as caliph within the space of little more than a year, and when finally their distant cousin, the shrewd and seasoned politician Marwan b. Muhammad, made his move from Armenia to seize power in Syria, he was not able to arrest the impetus of the forces of opposition that were gathering momentum against the Umayyads and that were shortly to culminate in the `Abbasid revolution.

In its account of these momentous years, al-Tabari's history concentrates on three major areas of the Islamic world: Syria, the center of Umayyad power; the garrison town of al-Kufah in Iraq; and the eastern provinces of Khurasan and Transoxiana. It is worthy of note that Spain, North Africa, Egypt, and the Hijaz are barely mentioned at all.

Al-Tabari records the end of Hisham's reign in exhaustive detail, and with a rich store of biographical anecdotes, before turning his attention to the notorious life-style of al-Walid II, both before and after his accession to the caliphate. In spite of al-Tabari's protestations that he has omitted many of the scabrous

stories about al-Walid (of. p. 1775), he gives a detailed account of this talented, if slightly deranged, member of the Umayyad family on whom subsequent `Abbasid anti-Umayyad propaganda fell with particular weight.

Al-Tabari chronicles at great length the events surrounding the last years of the Prophet Muhammad's great-great-grandson, Zayd b. `Ali, his various litigation proceedings, his unsuccessful rebellion and his death in al-Kufah, and finally, the hounding and eventual murder in Khurasan of Zayd's son, Yahya. Turning further to the east, al-Tabari records in detail the activities of the last Umayyad governor of Khurasan, Nasr b. Sayyar.

To what extent al-Tabari's selection of his material for these five crucial years is dictated by the availability of historiographical, oral, and archival sources, or by a deliberate emphasis on these three geographical areas, it is impossible to say. The reader cannot, however, dispute the undeniable importance of the events chronicled by al-Tabari for an understanding of the manifold elements of disaffection against the Umayyads which shortly afterward erupted into revolution.

What of the sources on which al-Tabari draws for his account of the events in these three main geographical areas? For his coverage of the Umayyad caliphs Hisham, al-Walid II, and Yazid III in Syria, al-Tabari relies heavily on reports from al-Mada'ini (died probably in 228/843), through the latter's pupil Ahmad b. Zuhayr (died 279/892), a Hanbali from Baghdad whose work *al-Ta'rikh al-kabir* (extant only in fragmentary form) was a direct source for al-Tabari.

For his narrative of events in Iraq, for the torture and death of Khalid al-Qasri at the hands of Yusuf b. `Umar and especially for the lengthy accounts of the litigation and rebellion of Zayd b. `Ali, al-Tabari's major source is Abu Mikhnaf (died 157/774), usually through reports transmitted by Hisham b. Muhammad al-Kalbi (died 204 or 206/819 or 821). The importance accorded by Abu Mikhnaf to the rebellion of Zayd b. `Ali probably sprang more from geographical factors than religious conviction. The Kufan historian naturally gave thorough coverage of local events without necessarily revealing a Shi'ite bias. Indeed, Abu Mikhnaf's account of Zayd's marriage in al-Kufah (pp. 1685-86) could be

construed as slightly derogatory to him. Nor, moreover, does al-Tabari opt to omit this episode, as does al-Baladhuri.

Al-Tabari uses reports of Hisham b. Muhammad al-Kalbi, quoting either Abu Mikhnaf or other unspecified sources. Hisham al-Kalbi was also a Kufan and had access to material both from Abu Mikhnaf and from his own father, Muhammad al-Kalbi. Hisham's son, al-`Abbas, who is known to have been an informant for al-Baladhuri, may well have been the missing transmitter through whom al-Tabari derived the information, if it was passed on orally.

For his material on Khurasan and Transoxiana, all of al-Tabari's attributed reports come from al-Mada'ini, a historian who was highly praised by `Abbasid and later Muslim scholars as an authority on events in the eastern Islamic world. Much of the information provided by al-Mada'ini in al-Tabari's coverage of these years is not extant in any other sources. The material is therefore difficult to assess: Sometimes it is very lacunary and on other occasions the anecdotes are full and have the flavor of composite accounts or folk tales.

This section of al-Tabari's history contains a number of interesting chancery or *insha'* documents which, if authentic (and they probably are), have considerable value. These include the correspondence between the caliph Hisham and his heir-apparent, al-Walid, which records the deterioration in their relationship (pp. 1746-49). For this correspondence there are parallel versions in the *Ansab* and the *Aghani*. By far the most challenging of these documents (and of daunting difficulty to the translator) is the elaborate and lengthy epistle of al-Walid, designating his two young sons as his successors (pp. 1756-64). It is clear that the text is corrupt in a number of places and there is no other extant version with which to compare it. Nevertheless, in spite of its verbal conceits, contorted style, and tedious length, it is at times a *tour de force*, an arousing and persuasive piece of early Arabic rhetorical prose.

The poetry in this volume is of varying quality, most of it poor. The arrangement of the lines of verse is often unsatisfactory and probably on occasion out of sequence. Rising above the mediocre, however, is the fine poetry that is attributed to al-Walid II himself

and that was edited by Gabrieli from the texts of al-Tabari, al-Isfahani, and Ibn `Abd Rabbihi.

My remarks on the manuscripts of al-Tabari's history, which form the basis of this section of the Leiden edition, must inevitably be limited, since I have not had the opportunity to view the manuscripts personally. M. J. de Goeje, who took over from D. H. Müller the task of editing these pages, used three manuscriptsthose in Oxford (O), the British Museum (BM), and Berlin (B)for most of this section of the text (pp. 1667-1811). Thereafter he was limited to only two (BM and B), since the Oxford manuscript had come to an end (pp. 1811-25). For the final pages he had only one manuscript (O), as the British Museum manuscript had also finished (p. 1825).

Considerable help is provided by other parallel sources at certain points in this section of al-Tabari's text. The *Kitab al-`uyun wa-al-hada'iq fi akhbar al-haqa'iq*, edited by M. J. de Goeje and P. de Jong under the title *Fragmenta Historicorum Arabicorum* (and abbreviated in this volume as *Fragmenta*) covers much of the material on the Umayyad caliphs. Many of the details of the relationship between Hisham and al-Walid and of the brief caliphate of al-Walid, provided by al-Tabari, are also to be found in al-Isfahani's *Kitab al-Aghani* and al-Baladhuri's *Ansab al-Ashraf*. The wording of the *Ansab* is almost always identical with that found in the later *Fragmenta*.

For the events concerning Zayd b. `Ali and his son Yahya, there are parallel, often identical, accounts to be found in the *Ansab* and in al-Isfahani's *Maqatil al-Talibiyyin*. For Khurasan and Transoxiana there is, however, a paucity of early extant sources which would help to clarify a number of obscurities in the relevant part of al-Tabari's text. There are only Narshakhi's *History of Bukhara* which gives an account of the murder of the Bukhar Khudah very like that of al-Tabari (pp. 1693-94), and al-Dinawari's version of the exploits of al-Kirmani (pp. 1858-66), which at times diverges considerably from al-Tabari's account.

The basis of the translation provided here has been the Leiden text. Although there are a number of unsolved textual difficulties, de Goeje's editing achievement with its full critical apparatus still excites admiration even after the lapse of a century. The Cairo edition of al-Tabari has also been consulted throughout. At

times it has helped in the clarification of textual problems. On other occasions it has been found to make changes in the text without satisfactory explanation.

There is a considerable corpus of secondary scholarly literature which helps to throw light on this crucial section of Umayyad history. The general reader is directed to G. R. Hawting's recent book, *The First Dynasty of Islam: The Umayyad Caliphate. A.D. 661-750*, for a clear and balanced account of the Umayyads. Further detailed accounts can be found in the pioneer works of Wellhausen, Gibb, and Gabrieli and in the more recent studies of Shaban. For the topography of al-Kufah, the work of Massignon is still useful, if taken in conjunction with the more recent researches of Djaït.

Several small miscellaneous points require brief mention. All quotations from the Qur'an have been made from *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*, translated by M. Pickthall (London, 1957). Often in the translation names or nouns have been provided instead of pronouns to clarify the narrative, and I have freely used synonyms for the ubiquitous 'said' and 'came.' Bolder changes of word order or other points of translation have been explained in the footnotes. It was not possible to identify all the personalities and place names mentioned in this section of al-Tabari's text, but the notes cover the great majority of these.

Finally, I should like to thank those who have helped with the task of producing this volume. I am most grateful to Mrs. Mona Bennett for her meticulous and patient typing of the translation and footnotes. Warm thanks also go to Dr. `Abd al-Mu`nim al-Zubaydi, who gave unstintingly of his vast expertise and knowledge to help with the clarification of the substantial quantity of poetry in this volume. Without his help certain of the verses would have remained obscure. My colleague, Dr. M. F. E1-Shayyal, read through the whole of the translation and made many valuable suggestions. I would also like to acknowledge the help given to me by Dr. James Allan; by my brother-in-law Dr. Peter Hillenbrand, who advised me on Hisham's alleged angina; by Dr. Ian Howard, who advised me on a number of points of detail; and by Dr. Martin Hinds and Dr. Patricia Crone, who gave me access, just before I completed this book, to the relevant sections of their new book, *God's Caliph*. Martin Hinds also gave me

other helpful information on certain detailed points in the text. Above all, I should like to thank Professor Edmund Bosworth for his constant willingness to help with advice and moral support; and my husband, Dr. Robert Hillenbrand, for his most valuable criticisms and comments.

CAROLE HILLENBRAND

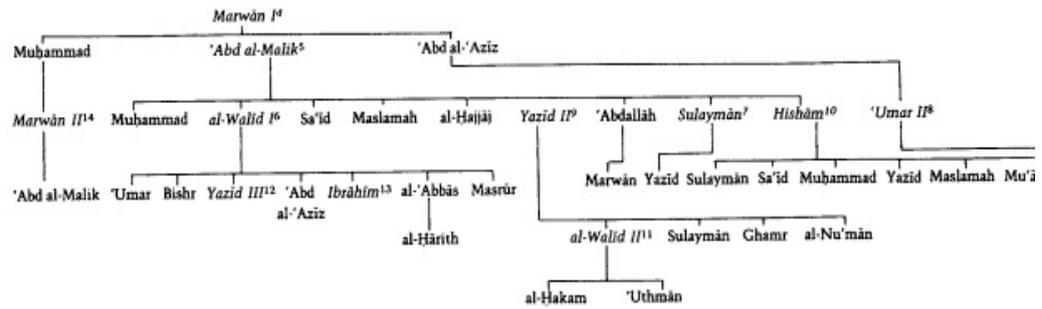


Table I.

Genealogy of the Later Umayyads

Notes:

*Italics* denote an Umayyad caliph.

The numbers by the names of the caliphs denote the chronological order of them. This table is not comprehensive. It includes the names of those Umayyads mentioned in Tabari's history.