

The second Himyarī lived, as is evident from the additions he made, in the early part of the tenth century A.H. (16th c. A.D.) In view of the scant additional information he gave, it seems to me that, only he deserves, to be called a copyist rather than an author, since he lacked completely the qualifications of an original author.

Supposedly al-Himyarī II was a descendant of al-Himyarī I. He inherited the book *Ar-Rawḍ al-Mi'tār* after his forebear, and the fact of this family connection, together with some small additions made to the *Ar-Rawḍ al-Mi'tār* work, enabled him to pose as its author.

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CONTRIBUTIONS OF 'ALĪ AL-ṬABARĪ TO NINTH-CENTURY ARABIC CULTURE

Abū'l-Hasan 'Alī b. Sahl Rabbān al-Ṭabarī (b. in Marw, Khurasān, 808, d. in Baghdād ca. 861) was active as a physician-statesman during the 9th century (3rd. A. H.), one of the great epochs in man's cultural history. This paper deals with some aspects and evaluations of his life and work.

'Alī was born into a prominent religious Syriac Christian family of Persia. His father was a highly placed government official who received the title of Rabbān (meaning our teacher) because of his vast learning and knowledge of medicine and philosophy, his religious and philanthropic activities, and his good deeds. He also took a special interest in the upbringing of his son. Beside giving him a good education, Rabbān taught him religion and a philosophy of life¹. Those concepts, exhortations, and doctrines were treasured in 'Alī's heart and led him to appreciate and love learning. When 'Alī was ten years old, he was taken to Ṭabaristān by his father, who was possibly sent there on an assignment for the state². Because of their residence in Ṭabaristān, the son was

¹ 'Alī al-Ṭabarī was first mentioned by the historian Muḥ. Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (839—923) who copied and admired 'Alī's *Firdaws al-Ḥikmah*. See Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī (1179—1229), *Dictionary of Learned Men*, D. S. Margoliouth ed., vol. 6, London, Luzac, 1931, pp. 429 and 460. A more detailed biography was given by Muḥ. Ishāq b. al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist* (completed 987), Cairo ed., Rahmāniyah Press, 1929, p. 426; and was quoted by Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qiftī (d. 1248) in his *Tārīkh al-Ḥukamā'*, J. Lippert ed., Leipzig, Dieterich 1903, p. 187.

² See the introduction to Ṭabarī's *Firdaws al-Ḥikmah*, ed. by Muḥ. Z. Šiddīqī, Berlin, Gibb Memorial 1928, pp. 1—2, 518; Zāhir al-Dīn

later known as al-Ṭabarī, as he will be called henceforth. Ṭabarī's lasting attachment to his adopted home resulted in his being in a congenial atmosphere which enabled him to devote his time to the study of medical, religious, and philosophical subjects, as well as various aspects of natural sciences (*al-'ulūm al-ḥikamīyah*). Most of the compendiums he studied — especially those dealing with medical topics — were written by eminent sages and doctors in the Syriac language, each devoted to a single theme or a specialized subject³.

At the time that Ṭabarī completed his studies, Ṭabaristān was in turmoil. Shāhriyār b. Wandād Hurmuz had taken over the governorship of Ṭabaristān by force after the death of his brother, Qārīn b. Wandād. The latter's son, Māziyār b. Qārīn, went to the Abbasid's capital in 825 to claim his rights to the governorship. There he secured permission from Caliph al-Ma'mūn (813—833) to rule two cities in Ṭabaristān as co-regent with his uncle. This resulted in a feud between the two, which Māziyār cunningly resolved by killing his uncle and taking over the entire region. It was during this time that Ṭabarī was appointed as secretary to Māziyār.

Towards the end of Ma'mūn's reign Māziyār renounced Islam and his allegiance to the Caliph and returned to Zoroastrianism, the religion of his forebears. Then, in a reckless adventure, he incited revolt among his people with Persian nationalistic tones against the status quo and apparently prospered for a few years.

The turning point came in 838—40, when the new Caliph al-Mu'taṣim (reigned 833—42), under the instigation of the general of the army, al-Afshīn, sent an army under the leadership of 'Alī

³ 'Alī al-Bayhaqī (d. 1170), *Tārīkh Ḥukamā' al-Islām*, Muḥ. Kurd 'Alī ed., Damascus, Arab Acad., 1946, p. 22; Muḥ. al-Shahrāzūrī (d. 1250), *Tawārīkh al-Ḥukamā'*, ms. no. 990 in Rāghib Library of Istanbul fol. 214 B-215A; and Heinrich Suter, *Die Mathematiker und Astronomer der Araber u. ihre Werke*, Leipzig 1900, p. 14.

³ Ṭabarī, *Firdaws*, pp. 2—3; and Aḥmad b. Abī Uṣaybi'ah (d. 1270), *Uyūn al-Anbā'*, vol. 1, Cairo ed., 1882, p. 309; and Max Meyerhof, *Alī ibn Rabbān at-Ṭabarī, ein persischer Arzt des IX. Jahrhunderts n. Chr.*, „Zeitschr. d. deutschen morgenländ. Gesellschaft“, 10 (1931), pp. 38—68.

(or 'Abd Allāh) b. Ṭāhir to defeat Māziyār. He was brought as a war prisoner to the Abbasid capital where he was cruelly executed⁴. With the fall of the Māziyār governorship, Ṭabarī either stayed in Āmul, Ṭabaristān, or fled with others to Marw (near present Tehrān) for safety. Having been highly recommended to the Caliph as a man of learning and of refined taste and administrative ability, he was summoned to the capital to serve at the palace. Soon Ṭabarī became a friend to Caliph al-Mu'taṣim and, through him, was introduced to Islam. Al-Mu'taṣim's successor, al-Wāthiq (reigned 842—47) continued to favor and appreciate the work and competence of Ṭabarī and his dedication to learning. It was under Caliph al-Mutawakkil (847—61), however, that Ṭabarī's position was promoted to that of companion to the Caliph, who „urged and encouraged“ Ṭabarī not only to embrace Islam and confess his adherence to this faith openly but to write polemics to defend his new faith against Judaism, Christianity, and other religions known in Persia. His best known treatise on the topic is his book on religion and the empire (*Al-Dīn wāl-Dawlah*) which we shall discuss shortly⁵.

In 850, the third year of the reign of al-Mutawakkil, Ṭabarī completed his medical encyclopedia, *Firdaws al-Hikmah* (Paradise of Wisdom). He had started this book almost two decades earlier after reading the available Syriac medical texts which he found confined to one subject each. His assignments and duties, first in Ṭabaristān and then at Sāmarrā', however, had prevented him from completing his encyclopedia sooner. The virtue of Ṭabarī's book was the abstracting of essential information from these Syriac texts, as well as from Greek and Indian compendiums, and compiling all the information and abstracts into a manageable volume which concisely embraced the whole field of medical

⁴ Aḥmad b. A. Ya'qūb b. Wāḍih (d. 897), *Tārīkh al-Ya'qubī*, ed. by Muḥ. S. Baḥr al-'Ulūm, vol. 3, Najaf, Iraq, Ḥaydariyah, 1965, pp. 210—11; and Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Literatur*, vol. 1, Leiden, Brill 1943, p. 265, and *GAL. Supplement*, vol. 1, Leiden 1937, pp. 414—15.

⁵ Ṭabarī's *al-Dīn wāl-Dawlah*, was edited by A. Mingana, with English translation and commentary, Cairo al-Muqtaṭaf, and Manchester, Longman 1922—23 (see introduction and epilogue).

knowledge⁶. As a medical encyclopedia it quickly became a model for later Arabic works on the subject. Thus his literary contributions became known and influenced medical circles for several centuries. Ṭabarī also justified his branching into other topics besides medicine in his compendium, such as natural sciences, cosmogony, and human behavior.

Firdaws, as a medical text for students of medicine and practitioners, was divided into seven sections in 30 treatises (360 chapters)⁷. In his quotations and discussions of Indian medicine, the author refers to such eminent doctors as Sushruta and Chanakya. Their works were translated directly from the Sanskrit into Arabic, as in the case of the *Ashtangahradaya* and *Nidānā* (on pathology), while others passed through the Persian version before being translated into Arabic, as was the treatise *Charaka-Samhitā*. These Indian texts enriched the information collected by Ṭabarī in his *Firdaws* in discussions related to materia medica, toxicology, psychotherapy, embryology, and surgery. Ṭabarī was influenced by native Persian medicine as well. Furthermore, through Syriac and Arabic versions of the Greek medical writings, Ṭabarī also incorporated much of the classical doctrines and concepts concerning sickness and health and the treatment of diseases. This is evident in the chapters on the nature of man, cosmogony, embryology, anatomy, child and mother care, motion, the senses, temperaments, humors, diets, utility of animal organs, treatment of fevers, epidemics, acute and other illnesses by simple and compound drugs, health resorts and waters diagnosis and prognosis⁸.

⁶ Ṭabarī, *Firdaws*, pp. 1—3; Edward G. Browne, *Arabian Medicine*, Cambridge, England 1921, pp. 37—44; and Alfred Siggel, *Die propädeutischen Kapitel aus dem Paradies der Weisheit über die Medizin des 'Alī b. Sahl Rabbān at-Ṭabarī*, in „Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Litteratur, Abhand. Geistes- und Sozialwissensch. Klasse“, Wiesbaden 1953.

⁷ Max Meyerhof in his paper 'Alī at-Ṭabarī's 'Paradise of Wisdom', one of the oldest Arabic Compendiums of Medicine, „Isis“, 16 (1931), pp. 6—54, gives a penetrating exposition of the life of Ṭabarī and an annotated list of the contents and scope of his *Firdaws*.

⁸ Ṭabarī, *Firdaws*, pp. 8, 557—98; Meyerhof, *Paradise of Wisdom*, „Isis“, 16 (1931), 12, 43—47; and *On the transmission of Greek and Indian Science to the Arabs*, „Islamic Culture“, 11 (1937), pp. 17—27.

Due to the wide scope of the book, the discussions within the *Firdaws* contents are less harmonious and organized than the author would like us to believe. The reader will also find some awkward expressions and usages of medical terminology, which are familiar in this formative period of Arabic medicine. Nevertheless, other important facets in this work demand appreciation and praise — not the least being the light thrown on the author's life and activities which are not available in other historical documents or biographies of the period. For example, Ṭabarī mentions how as a youth he was ambitious and desirous to accomplish great things to help others and to promote the welfare of his community. After much thought and deliberation, he resolved that he could best reach his goal and achieve his purposes more adequately through the practice of the healing art — which he defined as a profession for the preservation of health and prevention of illness. In his discussion of medical deontology, he listed five qualities that each ideally physician should possess:

1. To take heed of all necessary preparations which help to inspire comfort, foster hope (reassurance), and relaxation in the patient;
2. To diagnose and treat internal diseases through knowledge in therapeutics acquired through long experience;
3. To be kind and compassionate to all his patients whether learned or illiterate, of noble or humble origin, rich or poor, for all need his help;
4. To acquire a good reputation and the trust of his patients at all times in a profession respected by all people;
5. To realize that medicine's objectives, as the name suggests, are to seek man's healing and welfare.

He insisted that the conduct of practitioners should be as high as their calling. Those aspiring to practising health professions, he contended, should acquire four virtues essential in their everyday activity: gentleness, contentment, pity, and uprightness. In serving his patient, the physician's primary objective should be helping the sick rather than seeking monetary gain.

Ṭabarī recommended whenever possible the use of diets for cures before resorting to drugs. He heavily relied on the Hippocratic corpus and the writings of Galen. He also praised his two contem-

poraries, Yūḥannā b. Māsawayh (d. 857), the Caliph's own physician, and Hunayn b. Ishāq (d. 873) whom he called the translator. Ṭabarī, moreover emphasized psychotherapy and urged the physician to be smart and witty and able to inspire and encourage his patient to feel better. People frequently get sick through delusive imagination, Ṭabarī explained, but the competent doctor can inspire them to feel better by wise counseling. Ṭabarī emphasized the strong ties between psychology and medicine. Furthermore, he illustrated his views and convictions in humorous ways. For example, he relates the story of a clever practitioner he knew in Persia who, on receiving a patient during the grapes and watermelon season in the summer, would ask him: Did you eat grapes or watermelons? The patient, like the majority of his people, would often respond in the affirmative. The practitioner asserted that his intuition won the admiration and confidence of the patient who generally responded favorably to his treatment⁹. Such cases explain why Ṭabarī insisted on strict adherence to the high ethical standards for all practitioners of the healing art, in addition to competence in the theoretical and practical aspects of medicine. For these reasons, he stated that anyone who desires to practice the healing art should be intelligent, patient, clean, modest, honest, and congenial to his colleagues as well as towards his clients. Ṭabarī stated also that „a doctor should prove his competence by action and not by mere words... he should avoid being talkative, mean, undignified, profane or sacreligious... He should not be conceited, shabby in dress, critical of others, looking for faults in his colleagues. ... If he did not find any illness in his patient, he ought not give to him drugs or enemas, for if the drug does not find in the body a disease to fight and dissolve, it hurts the body's internal humors and interrupts its natural functions. He should not rush into making decisions or diagnosis until he is definitely sure... Furthermore, one drug might benefit someone, yet hurt another with a different disposition and temperament... He should use the best of drugs (e.i. unadulterated) and be careful with his weights“.

⁹ Ṭabarī, *Firdaws*, pp. 1—9, 537—540 and 557; Bayhaqī, *Tārīkh* Damascus ed., 1946, pp. 22—23; and George Sarton, *Introduction to the History of Science*, vol. 1, Baltimore 1927, pp. 546—49 and 574.

Ṭabarī also devoted several chapters in *Firdaws* to discussions on embryology, gynecology, and obstetrics — these branches of the healing art in which he benefitted from both Indian and Greek sources¹⁰.

The author seems to have been very confident and proud of the amount of information and personal observations and suggestions which he included in the *Firdaws*. Not satisfied that his book appeared in Arabic, he had it translated into Syriac. He distributed copies far and wide to colleagues and readers in the Eastern caliphate. He explained his concern with plagiarism, which seems to have been a known practice in his time¹¹. Now, we have even further evidences concerning a great number of plagiarized alchemical and philosophical books. As Ṭabarī's *Firdaws* was the first of its kind in Arabic in comprehensiveness and approach, the author was extremely careful to guard his right of authorship. His prediction proved true when one considers the amount of attention given to it by medical practitioners in Islam and its influence in content and style on later authors after the ninth century.

Another book of Ṭabarī's which this author feels deserves as much attention and consideration, although little known or influential or even acknowledged in the medieval period, is his book on religion and the empire (*Al-Dīn wā'l-Dawlah*) previously mentioned. Ṭabarī dedicated this book, as he did with the *Firdaws*, to his patron and benefactor Caliph al-Mutawakkil about 855. Ṭabarī explained how the Caliph encouraged him to write it. Since this book sheds considerable light on the life, religious beliefs, and philosophy of Ṭabarī and reflects the philosophical and religious thought of the time, it seems of interest to the history of the ninth-century religious and philosophical thought in Islam, particularly in Iraq and Persia¹².

¹⁰ Alfred Siggel, *Gynäkologie, Embryologie und Frauenhygiene aus dem 'Paradies der Weisheit über die Medizin' des A. Ḥasan 'Alī b. Saḥl Rabbān at-Ṭabarī*, „Quellen u. Studien zur Gesch. d. Naturwissen und Medizin“, Berlin, Springer 1941, vol. 8 parts 1 and 2, pp. 216—272.

¹¹ Ṭabarī, *Firdaws*, pp. 2—8.

¹² Ṭabarī, *al-Dīn wā'l-Dawlah*, Mingana's ed., 1923, pp. 5—8, 20—21, and 143—44. This edition was based on a ms. at The John

In this book Ṭabarī praised the Prophet of Islam and the true message he brought from God. Muhammad, he affirmed, was mentioned by the ancient prophets, „but their statements were concealed and wrongly interpreted“. Ṭabarī took it upon himself to elucidate these matters and „uncover the secrets“. He defended Islam in a very appropriate and scriptural approach; almost unknown or unfamiliar to Muslim authors of this medieval period¹³. Islam, Ṭabarī contended, was opposed to the prophet himself, in such matters as tradition, original pride and doubts which Ṭabarī tried to refute in ten points in this book. His arguments significantly display how thorough his acquaintance was with numerous portions of the Bible. Such knowledge was practically unheard of among the predominantly Muslim population under the Caliph. It was perceived only partially by a selected minority among the Christian and Jewish citizens of his time. In addition to biblical understanding, Ṭabarī seems to have acquired a thorough knowledge of the Qur'ān, „more than those who were born and raised in the Islamic faith“. He then added, „the arguments and logical evidences I bring were never presented by any Muslim author or theologian since the rise of Islam“¹⁴. Ṭabarī confessed that he was a Christian by natural birth and upbringing under the affectionate care of his pious father from whom he learned about Christianity and practised its rituals. After his father's death and his residence in the Abbasid's capital, he chose to embrace Islam and to confess it openly, despite op-

Rylands Library in Manchester, England copied in 616 A. H. (1220) by 'Abd al-Ḥamīd b. al-Ḥusayn b. Bashīq.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 5—8. A few Muslim historians such as the Ah. b. A. Ya'qūb Ibn Wādih in his *Tārīkh al-Ya'qubi* (d. 897), part 1, Najaf ed., Ḥaydariyah, 1964, pp. 3—68, seem to be acquainted with biblical writings, if only fragmentarily. This fact changed drastically in latter centuries so that no such quotations or consultations of the Scriptures are noticed obviously by Muslim authors from the 11th century up to the end of the 18th. This unfortunate situation was a direct result of complete ignorance, intolerance, bigotry and fanatic reaction against the New Testament message which the Qur'ān itself upheld and sanctioned.

¹⁴ Ṭabarī, *al-Dīn wā'l-Dawlah*, pp. 8—21 (Arabic text).

position from his cultured and highly respected uncle, Abū Zakkār Yaḥyā b. al-Na'mān who tried repeatedly, but in vain, to persuade Ṭabarī to renounce his new faith and return to Christianity.

Ṭabarī furthermore interpreted the four prophecies in Genesis (Chapters XVI: 4—16; XVII: 18—26; XXV: 7—18, and XXXVI: 3) using the Hebrew as well as the Syriac version of the Old Testament to prove that God's call and promises were to Muḥammad, as a prophet, from the seed of Ihmael. The author apparently was well acquainted with the Greek version of the Old Testament, the Septuagint. The revelations made by the Jewish Prophets of old as to how the wilderness would be restored and would blossom and flourish through God's blessings were interpreted by Ṭabarī as concerning the land of Arabia. These blessings and promises, he claimed, both materially and spiritually were fulfilled with the rise and triumph of Islam and the Arabic Empire¹⁵. He also insisted that there were changes and inaccuracies in the translations and copying of scriptural passages by the scribes who had done it.¹⁶ In defending wars of conquest and the use of sword, Ṭabarī also referred to several biblical passages which approved of such things¹⁷. He ended the text by explaining that he hoped that „this exposition of the truth would be met with applause and approval by all wise and noble men, both Muslims and Christians... My objectives were to share with them the light that I have seen and the victory which I gained“ he concluded¹⁸. Ṭabarī, however, was not highly admired by his Christian friends

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 73—118; *Deuteronomy* 18:15—20; *Psalms* 45:2—5, 48:1—3; 50:1—5, 72:6—19; 110:1—7, 149:4—8; *Isiah*, 2:12—19, 5:26—30; 9:3—7; 21:13—17, 35:1—4; 40:3—5; 41:8—20, 49:1—26; 54:1—3, 55:1—2; 60:10—13, 62:10—12; *Micah*, 4:1—2; *Habakkuk*, 3:3—15; *Zephaniah*, 3:8—10; *Zechariah*, 14:20—21; *Jeremiah*, 1:5—10; 31:31—34; 49:35—38; *Ezekiel*, 19:10—14, and *Daniel* 2:37—45, 7:3—14, 9:24—27. All references were taken from Hebrew and the Syriac version of the Bible and rendered into Arabic (the King James English version was consulted and used here).

¹⁶ Ṭabarī, *al-Dīn wā'l-Dawlah*, pp. 14, 73, 118—120, 124—127, 129, 134—5, 144.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 27, 121—22, 130—33.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 143—44.

whom he criticized because they considered him a heretic. Because of the author's untimely death (little over the age of fifty) this dialogue was unfortunately cut short. Furthermore, this book on religion and the empire was not widely circulated and its invaluable contents seem to have been completely overlooked and neglected by the Muslim majority. Otherwise, it would have been an eye opener for a constructive and useful dialogue if debated openmindedly among the various religious groups in the Middle East, especially those who believe in the revealed truth. Whether it was bigotry or limitations to free debate, it seems a pity that after Ṭabarī no Muslim scholar or philosopher including the most famous, al-Fārābī (d. 950), Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064), al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), and Ibn Rushd (Averroes d. 1199), seems to have completely ignored his noteworthy polemics.

Ṭabarī was the author of other works: *Tuḥfat al-Mulūk* and *Kunnāsh al-Ḥaḍrah* (two medical compendiums dedicated to the patron Caliph); a book on the uses of diets and drugs; *Ḥifẓ al-Ṣiḥḥah* (on the preservation of health); and a few other smaller works devoted to medical and theological themes. Undoubtedly, his two great literary contributions were the *Firdaws* and the *Dīn wā'l-Dawlah* which have already been discussed and evaluated. These give witness to the great cultural accomplishment of this vigorous scholar of the ninth century and his contributions to natural and medical sciences as well as to religious and philosophical thought.

The fact that the physician Abū Bakr al-Rāzī (865—925) did not study under Ṭabarī, since the latter had already been dead by the time of Rāzī, does not minimize the importance of Ṭabarī's contribution and influence on Arabic medicine and natural history. From the very writings of Rāzī's it is obvious that the latter benefited from the works of Ṭabarī and quoted them repeatedly ¹⁹.

¹⁹ F. Wüstenfeld, *Gesch. d. arab. Aerzte u. Naturforscher.*, Göttingen 1840, p. 21; Lucien Leclerc, *Histoire de la médecine arabe*, vol. 1, Paris 1876, pp. 292—93; Cyril Elgood, *A Medical History of Persia*, Cambridge, English University Press, 1951, pp. 140, 197, 340 and 372; and Sami Hamarneh, *Index of Manuscripts on Medicine in the Zahiriyah Library*, Damascus, Arab Academy, 1969, pp. 77—82.

Ṭabarī was the product of his time, a period of tremendous intellectual activity and productivity which reached its zenith before the end of the century. Many philosophical and religious schools of thought arose under the enlightened Abbasid caliphs, resulting in the great flourishing of cultural achievements as well as integrations of many civilizations and trends of thought that enriched this period. Through his far sightedness, industry, and genius, Ṭabarī contributed materially to ninth-century Arabic learning and scholarship.