

THE CHARGE OF SHĪ'ISM AGAINST AṬ-ṬABARĪ

WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO HIS TAḤSĪR

by

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ABSTRACT

V

The aim of the present work is to look into the relationship of Abū-Ja'far Muhammad ibn-Jarīr at-Ṭabarī (224? - 310 A.H.), the famous historian and commentator on the Qur'ān, with Shī'ism. Some of those who dealt with Ṭabarī speak of him as a devoted Shī'ite prepared to do everything in his power to serve the movement. He can go as far as telling lies on behalf of the Prophet in order to achieve his ends. Others speak of him as a moderate Shī'ite whose association with the Shī'ite movement causes no harm.

In the first chapter we try to find out elements leading to Ṭabarī being accused of Shī'ism and heresy. Notes about prominent teachers, some of whom supply Ṭabarī with information of obvious Shī'ite character, are given. Some personalities who took hostile attitude towards Ṭabarī are also mentioned. Comments on Ṭabarī's theological position by authors of biographies, both Sunnites and Shī'ites, are examined. Facts presented in this chapter point to Ṭabarī's inclination towards the Sunnites rather than the Shī'ites.

In the following chapters we went on to examine the views defended and elaborated by Ṭabarī's own pen. The system adopted is to compare the teachings of the Shī'ites to those of the Sunnites on certain questions. Ṭabarī's own views, mainly mentioned in his Tafsīr but sometimes elsewhere, are examined to

see whether they are in line with any of the two groups. The Imamate, Infallibility of the Prophets and imams, Return, Abrogation and Vision of God constitute the theological problems discussed. The last chapter deals with two controversial issues in the field of jurisprudence; these are (a) temporary marriage technically known as mut'a and (b) the wiping of the sandals and purification of feet in preparation for prayer.

A summary of the important results attained is given in the conclusion where the unjustifiability of the charges of Shi'ism and heresy against Ṭabarī is stated.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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My warm thanks are also due to Dr. P. Cachia of the University of Edinburgh who rejected the original plan for this thesis. His objection was based on the ground that the then proposed plan was too huge for a study of three years or so. This gave me the opportunity to reconsider the matter and the result was the confinement to the one aspect discussed in this thesis.

The staff of the library at the University of Edinburgh made every effort to eliminate the difficulties I faced during the course of my study. Most of the books unavailable at Edinburgh were readily made obtainable.

Last but by no means least I should like to express my gratitude to Mrs. Widdowson of the French Institution, 13 Randolph Crescent, Edinburgh, who took the pains of translating an article in R.E.I. from French into English.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

The Life of Ṭabarī⁽¹⁾ as a background to the charge of
Shī'ism against him.

Abū-Ja'far Muḥammad ibn-Jarīr ibn-Yazīd ibn-Kathīr aṭ-Ṭabarī lived from 224 ? A.H. to 310. He was born at the city of Āmul which was then the most important place in the province of Ṭabaristān. The name 'Ṭabarī', by which Abū-Ja'far Muḥammad ibn-Jarīr is best known, is derived from Ṭabaristān. To distinguish Ṭabaristān from the lake of Ṭabariyya while naming different scholars attributed to them, geneologists thought it best to add the letters 'an' to the latter. Thus the names Ṭabarī and Ṭabarānī. geneology

Scholars from Ṭabaristān are more or less thrown into the shade by Abū-Ja'far Muḥammad ibn-Jarīr aṭ-Ṭabarī. Some of these scholars, such as 'Alī ibn-Zayd aṭ-Ṭabarī who acted as a secretary for al-Mu'taṣim (d. 227), could win their way to success. Abū-Ja'far Muḥammad ibn-Jarīr ibn-Rustum aṭ-Ṭabarī was also an outstanding scholar from Ṭabaristān. He was a contemporary of

1. For sources of Ṭabarī's life, see: M. Abū-l-faḍl Ibrāhīm's introduction to Ṭabarī's annals (Cairo, 1960), 32.

aṭ-Ṭabarī the commentator and contributed indirectly to his being accused of Shī'ism as we will see later.

Ṭabarī was brought up into a modest family about which we know little. At least we know that his father gave him every kind of encouragement and support. He used to send him a yearly allowance⁽¹⁾ which helped him to devote his time to learning. One of the few facts we know about Ṭabarī's family is that a nephew of his could acquire a place of distinction in the history of Arabic literature. This was the famous poet Abū-Bakr Muḥammad ibn-al-'Abbās al-Khuwārāzmī⁽²⁾ (d. 383). He was also known as aṭ-Ṭabarī because of his relationship with Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn-Jarīr aṭ-Ṭabarī.

At an early age Ṭabarī began to show signs of intelligence and literary talents. At the age of seven he was able to learn the Qur'ān by heart.⁽³⁾ He had his elementary education at his native city Āmul. By the age of twenty Āmul was too inadequate to satisfy his ambition. He had to leave it for other places where he could meet the celebrated scholars of his age. As we anticipate, he began his journey in search of

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1. This allowance did not always arrive punctually, Nicholson, L. history of the arabs, 350.
 2. See, Ibn-al-'Imād, Shadharāt, 3:105; Ibn-al-Athīr, Ansāb, 1:391; aṭ-Ṭahrānī, Muṣaffā-l-maqāl, 407.
 3. Yāqūt, Irshād, 6:426f.

knowledge by visiting the nearest point to his native home. This was Rayy. His visit to Rayy provided him with the opportunity of making contacts with Muḥammad ibn-Ḥumayd ar-Rāzī about whom we will concern ourselves when dealing with the teachers of aṭ-Ṭabarī. In Rayy Ṭabarī was able to learn, swallow and digest thousands of Prophetic traditions. While in Rayy, he used to visit a village which was not far away. There he met Aḥmad ibn-Ḥammād ad-Dūlābī from whom he copied the famous Maghāzī of Muḥammad ibn-Ishāq. (1)

From Rayy Ṭabarī took his way to Baghdād which was the main centre of learning in the Islamic Empire during the Abbāsīd era. Aḥmad ibn-Ḥanbal ash-Shaybānī was certainly the main figure after the death of the three leading Sunnite scholars, Abū-Ḥanīfa, Mālik and ash-Shāfi'ī. His followers, with whom Ṭabarī found himself in conflict later, exercised enormous influence in the city. Ṭabarī thought it necessary not to miss the chance of hearing from Aḥmad ibn-Ḥanbal who was a traditionist of the highest class. Unfortunately, however, Aḥmad ibn-Ḥanbal died shortly before the entrance of Ṭabarī into Baghdād. Since it is certain that Aḥmad ibn-Ḥanbal died in 241, one can be sure that Ṭabarī did not enter Baghdād before that date. This fact

1. Yāqūt, Irshād, 6:430.

is strengthened by the statement that more than one author of biographies tell us that he began his journeys about the age of twenty. (1)

Being disappointed by the death of Aḥmad ibn-Ḥanbal, Ṭabarī was not prepared to stay in Baghdād for long. He had to look for other centres where profound scholars were still alive. Passing through Wāsiṭ where he stayed for a while, he set out to Kūfa. In Kūfa, he was fortunate enough to meet Abū-Kurayb Muḥammad ibn-al-'Alā al-Hamadhānī who was one of the reliable teachers of his time. Abū-Kurayb was harsh and ill-tempered, (2) but Ṭabarī bore his harshness and ill temper in order to extract knowledge from him before leaving to Baṣra and again to Baghdād.

Ṭabarī returned to Baghdād where he studied Qur'ānic sciences and jurisprudence. In Baghdād Ṭabarī met the disciples of Abū-Ḥanīfa and ash-Shāfi'ī. We know at least of prominent Shāfi'ite scholars such as Muḥammad ibn-al-Ḥasan az-Za'farānī who influenced Ṭabarī greatly. (3)

Ṭabarī seemed to be unsatisfied with the knowledge he gained from the scholars of Rayy, Baghdād, Baṣra, Kūfa and Wāsiṭ. His thirst after knowledge was not yet quenched. He had to

1. e.g. Ṭāsh, Miftāḥ as-sa'āda, 1:415; Ibn-al-Jazarī, Nihāya, 2:107.

2. Yāqūt, Irshād, 6:431.

3. See, for example, Ṭ.T, 9:14; 13:80

prepare for a long and laborious journey. This journey was no nearer than Syria and Egypt. In Syria he had the opportunity of learning the Qur'ān in its different recitations. He stayed for a week or so exchanging views and collecting materials from scholars such as Abū-l-'Abbās al-Walīd ibn-Mazyad. The materials collected from Abū-l-'Abbās al-Walīd ibn-Mazyad were utilized by Ṭabarī in his Tafsīr. (1)

Leaving the mosque of Beirut, Ṭabarī crossed to Fustāṭ in Egypt. The disciples of Mālik and ash-Shāfi'ī continued to accelerate a tremendous cultural movement there. Ṭabarī did not seem to go to Medina where some students of Mālik were expected. His visit to Egypt, however, offered him an excellent chance to open a window towards the views of Mālik and his way of thinking. Nevertheless he was much more influenced by the Shāfi'ite system of law. The so-called new Shāfi'ite system in Egypt was communicated to Ṭabarī by ar-Rabī' ibn-Sulaymān al-Murādī and other Egyptian scholars.

Ṭabarī continued to hold Shāfi'ite views for a considerable period of time. He passed Shāfi'ite judgements, aftā, over controversial matters for about ten years. But at last he had to form his own personal judgements after making tremendous physical effort and immeasurable mental labouring. He

1. e.g., 6:121

began to show himself as an independent thinker having the right to criticize all existing schools of law as early as his visit to Fustāṭ in 253. (1)

In addition to his theological and judicial activities, Ṭabarī was called upon to do some linguistic work in Egypt. He gave lectures on the poetry of aṭ-Ṭirimāḥ ibn-Ḥakīm, elucidating the meaning of the strange words. He conducted these lectures on the request of the Egyptian scholar Abū-l-Hasan 'Alī ibn-as-Sarāj who showed Ṭabarī every kind of hospitality. (2) When the Egyptian scholars heard of the coming of Ṭabarī, whose reputation was already great and wide, they seized the opportunity of examining his mental capacities. Being asked about the science of poetical metres known as 'ilm al-'arūd of which he had little or no previous knowledge, Ṭabarī took the advantage of filling up that serious gap. Being accustomed to seek knowledge through its proper channels, he directly appealed to the authority of al-Khalīl ibn-Aḥmad, the founder of the science. He immediately borrowed one of the primary sources of 'ilm al-'arūd and studied it with care and vigour. (3)

In Egypt Ṭabarī was no longer a student acquiring

1. Yāqūt, Irshād, 6:432f.

2. Ibid., 6:432.

3. Ibid., 6:434f.

knowledge for himself only. Following the policy of 'give and take', Ṭabarī set the best example of a true scholar. From Egypt he returned to Baghdād as a mature and well qualified savant. As such he intended to stay permanently in Baghdād. He, however, left it twice to go to Āmul, his native country. The purpose of these two journeys has little to do with learning. The first seems to be a matter of personal interest in visiting his homeland after that long departure. The second seems to be a religious objective. Being the most famous religious leader ever to emerge from Ṭabaristān, he thought he could do something to prevent his fellowmen from the habit of cursing Abū-Bakr and 'Umar to whom he shows every mark of love, respect and admiration. (1) But at last he had to flee to Baghdād to spend the rest of his life.

Having finished with Ṭabarī's birth, family and journeys in search of knowledge, a few pages will be devoted to his teachers. Ṭabarī's thirst after knowledge was not sufficiently gratified by one or two scholars of his age; he had to travel, as we have seen, from one place to another listening to a countless number of scholars in various branches of the known sciences. The information passed by any scholar will be more or less coloured by his own theological views and attitude towards problems

1. Yāqūt, Irshād, 6:456.

in general. This fact presents itself evidently in the Tafsīr of Ṭabarī where quotations and commentaries from opposing sources are to be found. This supplied the enemies of Ṭabarī with deadly weapons and opened the way for every sort of accusation of deviation from the right path.

Here we will suffice ourselves with mentioning a few remarks about some of the influential teachers⁽¹⁾ of Ṭabarī.

(a) Muḥammad ibn-Ḥumayd ar-Rāzī:⁽²⁾

Ar-Rāzī is one of the important men who exercised a profound effect on Ṭabarī. He himself was able to win the title of a ḥāfiẓ. He studied under Salama ibn-al-Faḍl who was one of the authorities in the Maghāzī of Muḥammad ibn-Ishāq. In spite of his wide knowledge ar-Rāzī had to face bitter criticism by those engaged in distinguishing between the trustworthy and non-trustworthy traditionists. Ya'qūb ibn-Shayba made a dangerous remark about him. Many unknown traditions, manākīr, are claimed to be passed by him. Abū-'Abd-Allāh Muḥammad ibn-Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī, the author of the ṣaḥīḥ, says that traditions related on the authority of ar-Rāzī should be taken with great care and caution, fī ḥadīthihi naẓar. An-Nasā'ī,

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1. The reader should also consult the valuable notes about the teachers of Ṭabarī given by Aḥmad Shākir at the bottom of the edition of his brother Maḥmūd Shākir to Ṭabarī's Tafsīr, Dār-al-ma'ārif, Egypt, 1374 A.H.
 2. For Rāzī, see: al-Khaṭīb, T. Baghdād, 2:259-264; Ibn-Ḥajar, Tahdhīb at-tahdhīb, 9:127-131.

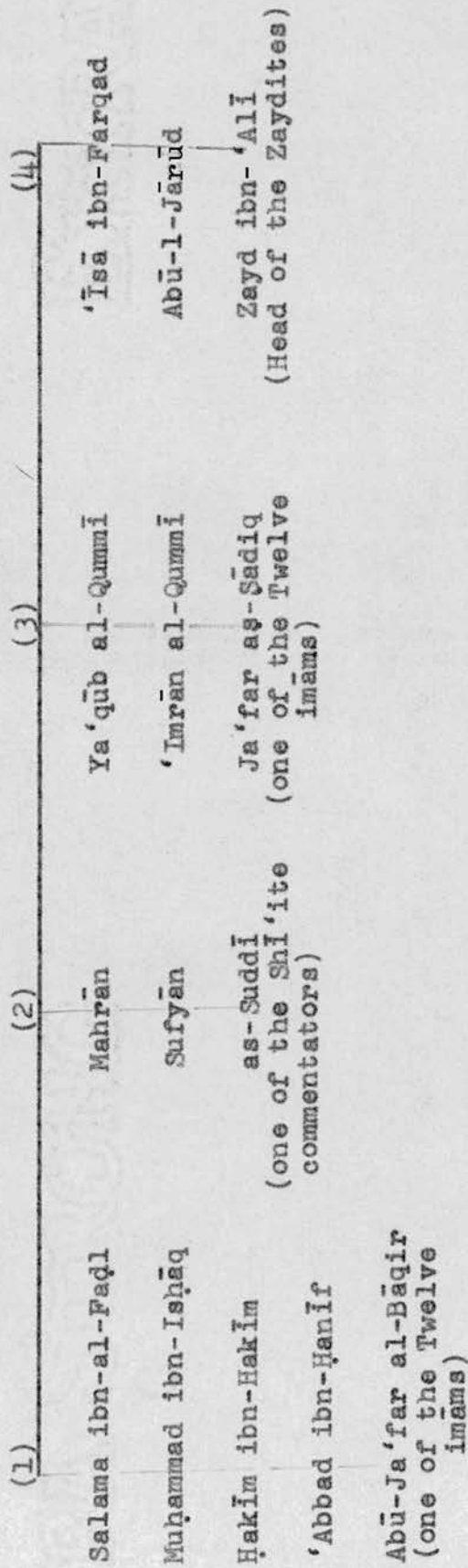
one of the authors of the six sahih, claimed that he was untrustworthy. He speaks of him as a man of strange traditions unrecognized by authorities of Hadith.⁽¹⁾

Still a more dangerous remark was that his faith was not clean or pure. Al-Jawzānī is reported to have said that ar-Rāzī was a man of filthy faith, radī' al-madhab. This, I gather, because he related many traditions which did not gain the acceptance and approval of the Sunnites. In my judgement ar-Rāzī was one of the elements which largely contributed to the problem of Ṭabarī being accused of Shī'ism which is our main occupation of this thesis. He was certainly one of the main channels of Ṭabarī to information of Shī'ite character. Together with some other scholars, he made him acquainted with men of Shī'ite tendencies. The following table may give a quick idea about the type of information received from ar-Rāzī.

1. Ibn-Ḥajar, T. at-tahdhīb, 9:131.

Muḥammad ibn-Jarīr aṭ-Ṭabarī

Muḥammad ibn-Ḥumayd ar-Rāzī



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1. For this isnād see, for example, i.T., 10:41
 2. " " " " , 12:54
 3. " " " " , 11:46
 4. " " " " , 3:192

(b) Abū-Kurayb Muḥammad ibn-al-A'la al-Hamadhānī: (1)

Abū-Kurayb (161-248 A.H) was a scholar of Kūfa. He was a disciple of profound scholars such as Wakī' ibn-al-Jarrāḥ, Sufyān ibn-'Uyayna and Yaḥyā ibn-Adam, (2) the author of al-Kharāj.

Abū-Kurayb is accepted as trustworthy by the six famous Sunnite collectors of authentic traditions. Al-Bukhārī related 75 traditions on his authority while Muslim received 556 traditions from him. The area of his intellectual activities was al-Kūfa where about 300,000 traditions related by him were said to be in circulation.

Aḥmad ibn-Ḥanbal is reported to have abstained from Abū-Kurayb in spite of his wide recognition by traditionists. The stand of Abū-Kurayb from the question of the creation of the Qur'ān proved to be unsatisfactory as far as Aḥmad ibn-Ḥanbal was concerned. 'Abd-Allāh, the son of Aḥmad ibn-Ḥanbal, was, however, among those who appealed to the authority of Abū-Kurayb.

Abū-Kurayb was one of the main sources of Ṭabarī's knowledge of the various readings of the Qur'ānic text. (3) Also, some of the Mālikī views were received by Ṭabarī through him. (4)

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1. For Abū-Kurayb see: Ibn-Ḥajar, T. at-tahdhīb, 9:385f; Ibn-al-Jazarī, Nihāya, 2:197.
 2. See, al-Kharāj, 15 ed. by Aḥmad Shākir, Cairo, 1347.
 3. See, for example, T.T, 7:19.
 4. e.g. 14:36.

(c) Hannād ibn-as-Sarī ibn-Muṣ'ab: (1)

Hannād (152-243 A.H.) was also a scholar of Kūfa. He was recognized by all men of traditions, al-Bukhārī and the rest. Being a student of important savants such as Wakī' ibn-al-Jarrāḥ, Sufyān ibn-'Uyayna and Yaḥyā ibn-Zā'ida, he was able to supply Ṭabarī with indispensable knowledge.

Ṭabarī came to know about the extinct school of law of al-Awzā'ī through the authority of Hannād ibn-as-Sarī and others. (2) He was also one of the means of Ṭabarī obtaining knowledge of the different readings of the Qur'ān. (3)

(d) Naṣr ibn-'Alī ibn-Naṣr ibn-'Alī al-Jahḍamī: (4)

Naṣr ibn-'Alī (d. 250 A.H.) was born at Jahḍama, a village near Baṣra. Hence he was famous by the name Jahḍamī. Holding the office and title of Judge of Baṣra, he could win his way to fame and success. The Caliph al-Musta'īn requested him to remain in office but he died before fulfilling the Caliph's wish.

Bukhārī, Muslim and other traditionists accepted Naṣr ibn-'Alī al-Jahḍamī as a reliable source on prophetic traditions.

1. For Hannād see, Ibn-Ḥajar, T. at-tahdhīb, 11:70f.

2. See, for instance, T.T., 6:49.

3. Ibid., 7:19.

4. For al-Jahḍamī see, al-Khaṭīb, T. Baghdād, 13:287-289; Ibn-al-Jazarī, Nihāya, 2:373f; Ibn-al-Athīr, Ansāb, 1:258.

A curious tradition is, however, introduced in the Musnad⁽¹⁾ of Aḥmad ibn-Ḥanbal and Tārīkh⁽²⁾ Baghdād of al-Khatīb concerning his Shī'ite inclination. The tradition shows, if we accept it as correct, strong association with the Shī'ites. It goes as follows: 'Abd-Allāh ibn-Aḥmad ibn-Ḥanbal relates on the authority of Naṣr ibn-'Alī al-Jahḍamī, on the authority of 'Alī ibn-Ja'far, on the authority of Mūsā-l-Kāzīm, on the authority of 'Alī ibn-al-Ḥusayn, on the authority of al-Ḥusayn ibn-'Alī, on the authority of 'Alī ibn-Abī-Ṭālib that the prophet pointed to al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn and said: "whoever loves me and loves these two together with their father and mother will accompany me in paradise."

When al-Mutawakkil, who favoured Aḥmad ibn-Ḥanbal and the Sunnites, heard that tradition, he decided to punish Naṣr ibn-'Alī for relating it. A certain person, however, managed to convince al-Mutawakkil that Naṣr ibn-'Alī was one of those who defend the cause of the Sunnites vigorously. This Naṣr ibn-'Alī was one of the teachers of Ṭabarī. He was one of those who contributed to Ṭabarī's knowledge of the various readings of the Qur'ān.⁽³⁾

1. 2:25f.

2. 13:288.

3. See, for instance, T.T, 15:47.

(e) Abū-'Abd-Allāh Muḥammad ibn-'Abd-al-Malik ibn-Abī-sh-Shawārib: (1)

Ibn-Abī-sh-Shawārib was a savant of Baṣra who died in 244 A.H. He was appointed as a Judge for Persia. An-Nasā'ī accepted him as trustworthy; Muslim related ten prophetic traditions on his authority. There is no doubt that he held the Sunnite views. When al-Mutawakkil decided to abolish by law the Mu'tazilite doctrine of the creation of the Qur'ān, he thought it necessary to promote the chances of anti-Mu'tazilite scholars. Ibn-Abī-sh-Shawārib was one of those sent by al-Mutawakkil in 234 to propagate the new ideology. Ṭabarī was one of the disciples of this strong Sunnite leader. (2)

(f) al-Ḥasan ibn-Muḥammad ibn-aṣ-Ṣabbāḥ az-Za'farānī: (3)

Al-Ḥasan ibn-Muḥammad ibn-aṣ-Ṣabbāḥ was a scholar from az-Za'farāniyya, a village near Baghdād. The six men of the Ṣiḥāḥ, with the exception of Muslim, related traditions on his authority. He contributed a lot to Ṭabarī's culture. An-Nawawī tells us that the old system of the Shāfi'ite law was transmitted to Ṭabarī through the authority of az-Za'farānī. (4) Ṭabarī utilized the information he possessed from az-Za'farānī in his vast Tafsīr. (5)

1. For ibn-Abī-sh-Shawārib see, al-Khaṭīb, T. Baghdād, 2:3441f; Ibn-Ḥajar, T. at-tahdhīb, 9:316f.

2. See, for example, Ṭ.T, 4:6 and Ibn-Ḥajar, T. at-tahdhīb, 9:316f.

3. For al-Ḥasan az-Za'farānī see: Ibn-Ḥajar, T. at-tahdhīb, 2:318f.

4. Tahdhīb, 1:79.

5. See, for example, 13:80; 14:9.

(g) Yūnus ibn-'Abd-al-A'lā ibn-Mūsā aṣ-Ṣadafī:⁽¹⁾

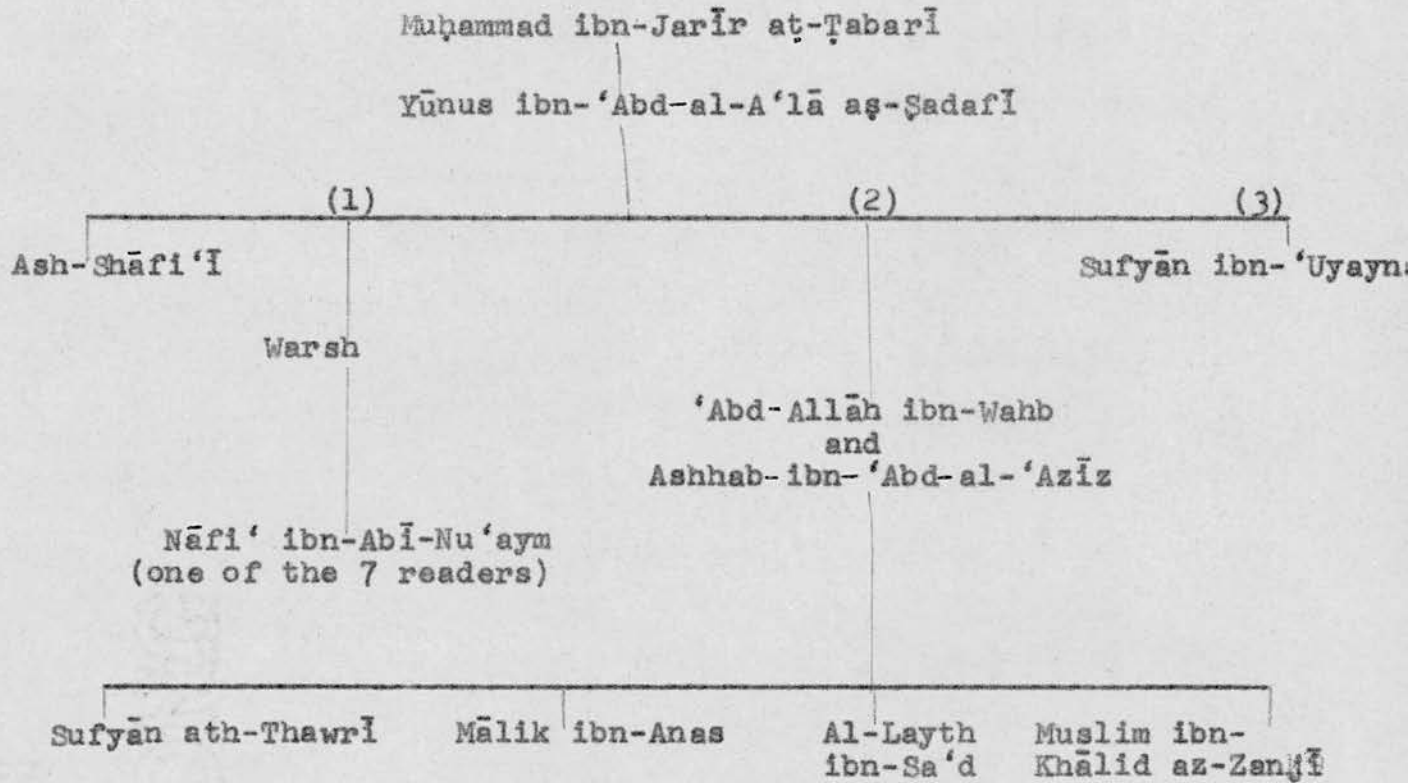
Yūnus ibn-'Abd-al-A'lā (170-264 A.H.) was an Egyptian scholar. He was a disciple of ash-Shāfi'ī, Sufyān ibn-'Uyayna, al-Walīd ibn-Muslim, Ashhab ibn-'Abd-al-'Azīz and 'Abd-Allāh ibn-Wahb. He was a jurist of the highest quality, and Ṭabarī was fortunate enough to form an intellectual relationship with him during his presence in Egypt. In the field of the prophetic traditions he was one of the trustworthy men. Muslim, an-Nasā'ī, Ṭabarī and several others acknowledged his authority. In addition to Jurisprudence and prophetic traditions, he was also versed in Qur'ānic readings. In this field he was a student of Warsh and ibn-Diḥya, the famous Egyptian rāwī. Yūnus was one of five men who proved to be most useful to Ṭabarī as far as the readings of the Qur'ān were concerned.⁽²⁾

Yūnus ibn-'Abd-al-A'lā seemed to hold very strong ideas against the Shī'ite teachings. Ibn-Māja introduced in his Sunan a tradition attributed to ash-Shāfi'ī, through the authority of Yūnus ibn-'Abd al-A'lā to the effect that there is no Mahdī beside Jesus Christ. Even the Sunnites seem to doubt the authenticity of this tradition.⁽³⁾ We will see in the chapter

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1. For aṣ-Ṣadafī see, Nawawī, Tahdhīb, 2:168; Ibn-al-Jazarī, Nihāya, 2:304; Ibn-Ḥajar, T. at-tahdhīb, 11:44Of; Ibn-al-Athīr, Ansāb, 2:51.
 2. The other four are: (a) Sulaymān ibn-Ḥamid ibn-Khallād, (b) al-'Abbās ibn-al-Walīd ibn-Mazyad, (c) Abū-Kurayb Muḥammad ibn-al-'Alā al-Hamadhānī and (d) Ahmad ibn-Yūsuf at-Taghlabī, Ibn-al-Jazarī, Nihāya, 2:107.
 3. Ibn-Ḥajar, T. at-tahdhīb, 11:44Of.

of the 'return' how the Shī'ites criticize Muslims who hold such a view as the Mahdī is more important in their theology than Jesus Christ himself.

The Tafsīr of Ṭabarī is full of information which goes back to Yūnus ibn-'Abd-al-A'lā who made Ṭabarī acquainted with many important Muslim scholars. The following table might give us a preliminary idea about the enormous mass of knowledge passed over by Yūnus ibn-'Abd-al-A'lā.



1. For this isnād see, for example, T.T., 14:80.

2. " " " " " " " " , 1:28; 1:342; 2:32 etc.

3. " " " " " " " " , 2:61; 2:63, 2:309 etc.

After Ṭabarī's acquisition of knowledge from these scholars and many others, the majority of whom were strict Sunnites, he figured in Baghdād as an influential religious leader. Ibn-Isfandiyyār says of his fame in Baghdād, "it is said that 400 riding-camels might daily be seen waiting at the gate of his house in Baghdād, belonging to sons of the Caliphs, kings, ministers and amirs, 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." (1)

Although the picture presented by Ibn-Isfandiyyār might be slightly exaggerated, it obviously points to the fact that Ṭabarī was one of the few scholars surrounded by students from every corner of the Islamic world. Some of these students could easily win their way to eminence and success. We know, for example, of Aḥmad ibn-Kāmil⁽²⁾ al-Qādī (260-350 A.H.) who went as far as forming an independent school of his own; of ibn-Mujāhid⁽³⁾ who is famous as being the first one to formulate the Seven Readings of the Qur'ān; of aṭ-Ṭabarānī⁽⁴⁾ (260-360) who is well-known for his collection of the traditions of the

1. H. of Ṭabaristān, 74.

2. For Aḥmad ibn-Kāmil see, Yāqūt, Irshād, 2:16; Ibn-al-Jazarī, Nihāya, 1:98.

3. Ibid., 1:139-142.

4. Suyūṭī, Ṭ.al-mufasssīrīn, 30.

Prophet known as al-Ma'ājim and of Makhlad ibn-Ja'far⁽¹⁾ al-Bāqarḥī (d. 370 A.H.) who transmitted Ṭabarī's annals to later generations. المؤلف: شيخنا محمد بن عبد الله بن عمار

The school of Ṭabarī found a strong representative in Ibrāhīm ibn-Muḥammad ibn-Makhlad al-Bāqarḥī⁽²⁾ who died a century after Ṭabarī's death (i.e. 410 A.H.). An even more influential representative of Ṭabarī's school in the fourth century of Islam was Abū-l-Faraj al-Mu'āfā ibn-Zakariyā,⁽³⁾ an-Nahrawānī (d. 390). He is known as al-Jarīrī because of his sincere adherence to the school of Muḥammad ibn-Jarīr aṭ-Ṭabarī. He was reported to have related many of the traditions which favoured the Shī'ites. This attitude was very much deplored by the Sunnites.⁽⁴⁾ Accusation of Shī'ism appears to continue in Ṭabarī's followers. Some of his teachers, as we have seen, were also charged with equal accusations.

The influentiality, fame and success of Ṭabarī brought him the rivalry, envy and hostility of other scholars. The Ḥanbalites continued to be a source of trouble for him. As late as 309 A.H. i.e. just a year before his death, Ṭabarī was preparing

1. al-Khaṭīb, T. Baghdād, 13:176f.

2. Ibn-Taghrī Bardī, an-Nujūm, 4:245; Ibn-al-Jawzī, Muntaḥam, 7:294.

3. al-Khaṭīb, T. Baghdād, 13:230f; Ibn-Taghrī Bardī, an Nujūm, 4:201f; Ibn-al-Anbārī, Nuzha, 226f; Ibn-al-Jazarī, Nihāya, 2:302.

4. al-Khaṭīb, T. Baghdād, 13:231.

for a public discussion with them. Some say that the Ḥanbalites even prevented people from meeting with him. (1) Others claimed that he was buried at night for fear of them.

Ṭabarī had many enemies who made every effort to damage his reputation as a genuine religious leader. The easiest way to do this was to claim that he adopted heretical views. The common people who lacked insight into the ideological struggles did not usually question such claims. Great thinkers were normally the victims of accusation of heresy. Fakhr ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī (d. 660) complained that in spite of his unfailing efforts to defend the cause of the Sunnites, his enemies accused him of heterodoxy. (2) Ṭabarī was neither the first nor the last to be charged with unorthodoxy.

The views of people differed as far as the position of Ṭabarī was concerned. Some maintained that he deserved every kind of respect and admiration. Muḥammad ibn-Khuzayma, a contemporary of Ṭabarī, held that it would hardly be an exaggeration to assert that there was nobody on earth who possessed more adequate religious knowledge than Ṭabarī. (3) Ibn-al-Athīr

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1. Ṭabarī is not the only one to suffer from Ḥanbalite violence. Abū-'Abd-Allāh al-Qayrawānī (d. 512), for example, had to meet equal difficulties, Ibn-al-Jazarī, Nihāya, 2:196.
 2. I'tiqādāt, 92f.
 3. Ibn-al-'Imād, Shadharāt, 2:260.

maintained that he chose Ṭabarī as a source of historical knowledge for two reasons: firstly because of his vast and incomparable knowledge and secondly because of his truthful belief, ṣiḥat i'tiqād.⁽¹⁾ On the other hand a certain Ahmad ibn-'Alī as-Sulaymānī stated that Ṭabarī was one of those who related traditions of their own making and ascribed them to the prophet to find a better justification for their pre-conceived conceptions. He accused him of being a Rāfidite inventor of prophetic traditions.⁽²⁾

The ideas developed by Ṭabarī in his Tafsīr and other works are certainly unwelcomed by a number of people. He found himself in conflict with two influential schools of thought. The first school was represented by the Ḥanbalites and the other by the Ṣāḥirites. Both of these schools proved to be too rigid to tolerate the liberal ideas of Ṭabarī such as those on analogy and infallibility of the prophets. Analogy, infallibility and several other concepts will be our concern at a later stage.

Abū-Bakr, son of Abū-Dā'ūd as-Sijistānī the author of the Sunan and one of the six men of the ṣiḥāḥ, was one of the Muslim scholars in the Third century of Islam. He is famous as the author of Kitāb al-maṣāḥif.⁽³⁾ Being a strong rival of

1. al-'Azāwī, Historians of Irāq, 1:33.

2. Dhahabī, Mizān al-ī'tidāl, 3rd division, 498f.

3. This work is edited by A. Jeffery, Leiden, 1937.

Ṭabarī, he wrote a commentary on the Qur'ān immediately after the latter's start on his Tafsīr. He was deeply involved in Ṭabarī's accusation of heresy. Ibn-al-Jawzī tells us in his Muntaẓam ⁽¹⁾ that it was Abū-Bakr ibn-Abī-Dā'ūd who presented Ṭabarī's case to Naṣr al-Ḥājib to take the required legal measures. ^{أبو بكر بن أبي داود} It is curious that Arthur Jeffery made no reference to this remarkable struggle between the two scholars in his introductory note about Abū-Bakr ibn-Abī-Dā'ūd. ^{Jeffery}

The Ḥanbalites continued to be a source of menace to Ṭabarī till his last days. ⁽²⁾ One of the explanations given for that long and bitter controversy is that Ṭabarī made an unpleasant remark about Aḥmad ibn-Ḥanbal when he denied him the quality of a jurist. In the text concerning Ṭabarī's profession of faith edited by D. Sourdel, Ṭabarī, however, speaks very highly of Aḥmad ibn-Ḥanbal. He appears to take an apologetic attitude. ⁽³⁾ Strangely enough Ḥājī Khalīfa ⁽⁴⁾ speaks of Ṭabarī as belonging to the Ḥanbalite school!

Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī and other authors of biographies inform us of the bitter conflict between Ṭabarī and the Ḥanbalites

1. 6:172.

2. Ibn-al-Jawzī, Muntaẓam, 6:159.

3. R.E.I., XXXVI: 198.

4. Kashf az-ẓunūn, 2:1429.

who took violent measures to stop the former's intellectual activities. (1) Later Hanbalites, such as Ibn-Taymiyya and ibn-al-'Imād, recognized the greatness of Ṭabarī and admired his mental abilities. (2)

Ṭabarī had also to prepare himself for difficulties coming from the side of the Zāhirites. Yāqūt ar-Rūmī (3) tells us that Ṭabarī was a close associate of Dā'ūd ibn-'Alī al-Aṣḥānī (d. 270), the founder of the Zāhirites' school, for a considerable period of time. Ṭabarī, we are told, made use of the vast knowledge acquired by Dā'ūd ibn-'Alī but at last he had to break with him. He wrote a book entitled ar-Radd 'alā dhī-l-asfār refuting the ideas formulated and elaborated by Dā'ūd ibn-'Alī.

The controversy initiated by Dā'ūd ibn-'Alī was taken up again by his son Abū-Bakr (d. 297). Abū-Bakr ibn-Dā'ūd ibn-'Alī followed and defended the religious views held by his father. He composed a book entitled al-Intiṣār min Abī-Ja'far aṭ-Ṭabarī (4) i.e. the refutation of Ṭabarī. The disciples of Ṭabarī participated in that controversy. One of them, we are told, wrote a book defending Ṭabarī's position and attacking his enemy i.e. Abū-Bakr

1. T. Baghdād, 2:164.

2. See, for example, Ibn-al-'Imād, Shadharāt, 2:260.

3. Irshād, 6:450.

4. Ibn-an-Nadīm, Fihrist, 305; Yāqūt, Irshād, 6:452.

ibn-Dā'ūd ibn-'Alī al-Aṣṣfahānī. (1)

Al-Qādī Abū-Ja'far at-Tanūkhī (d. 318) known as ibn-Buhlūl and one of the judges consulted about the heresy of al-Hallāj, was also a rival of Ṭabarī. (2) However the material at our disposal does not show whether or not he was involved in the question of the accusation of Ṭabarī with Shī'ism.

The enemies of Ṭabarī, some of whom we have just referred to, had certainly much to do with the issue at hand, namely his being accused with heterodoxical inclinations. These enemies presumably sought to darken his name especially in the eyes of the mobs who were easily moved and persuaded, and from whom Ṭabarī suffered a lot.

Another factor, which might have added to the difficulties of Ṭabarī, emerged out of confusion of names. Shams ad-Dīn adh-Dhahabī suggested that it was not Abū-Ja'far Muḥammad ibn-Jarīr at-Ṭabarī, the famous author of Tafsīr and History, who used to invent traditions attributed to the Prophet to support the Rāfidite's (3) cause. It is, he continued, Abū-Ja'far Muḥammad ibn-Jarīr ibn-Rustum at-Ṭabarī (4) who took exactly the same kunya and nisba together with the first and second name of our Ṭabarī. Abū-Ja'far Muḥammad ibn-Jarīr ibn-

1. Ibn-an-Nadīm, Fihrist, 328f.

2. Ibn-al-Jawzī, Muntaẓam, 6:232f; Margoliouth, Lectures, 45.

3. For these see: Ash'arī, Maqālāt, 1:5ff; W.M. Watt, The Rāfidites, oriens, 16:110ff.

4. Mīzān al-i'tidāl, 3rd division, 498f.

- outspokenly - ad
 outspokenness & role

Just as al-Mustarshid

Rustum aṭ-Ṭabarī is well-known for his outspoken partiality towards 'Alī's House. Ibn-Isfandiyyār⁽¹⁾ says of him: "He was a fervent Shī'ite, and was a long while in attendance on the eighth Imām, 'Alī ibn-Mūsā ar-Riḍā. His most famous works are the Kitābu-l-mustarshid⁽²⁾ and the Kitāb Khu dhu-n-na'1 [Book of "Pluck off Thy Shoes"]".

Both of these men, our Ṭabarī and Ibn-Rustum aṭ-Ṭabarī, should be distinguished from Abū-Ja'far Aḥmad ibn-Muḥammad ibn-Rustum aṭ-Ṭabarī, the author of Gharīb al-qur'ān.⁽³⁾

Also, Ṭabarī, at first a follower of ash-Shāfi'ī, was able to create an independent school of his own. This school is known as al-Madhab al-Jarīrī, named after his father's name. His followers, such as Abūl-Faraj al-Mu'āfā ibn-Zakariyā' an-Nahrawānī to whom we referred earlier, took that name to distinguish them from others. But the trouble of confusion of names is still there. Sulaymān ibn-Jarīr, of the Zaydite Shī'ite sub-division, formed a school which either took his name or his father's name, Sulaymāniyya or Jarīriyya.⁽⁴⁾

Besides these two factors, the propaganda spread by

1. H. of Ṭabaristān, 79.
2. This is a work on the Imamate, Aṭ-Ṭahrānī, Muṣaffā-l-maqāl, 398. Both books deal with questions of interest for the Shī'ites as we will see in the chapter of the Imamate and that of Judicial differences.
3. Ibn-an-Nadīm, Fihrist, 89; Ibn-al-Jazarī, Nihāya, 1:114f.
4. Baghdādī, Uṣūl, 280f and Farq, 22. Neither al-Ash'arī, Maqālāt, 1:68 nor Shahrastānī, Milal, 1:214f gave it the name of Jarīriyya.

his enemies and confusion of names, a third possible element may be added. Every sect was anxious to make use of the reputation of bright and respectful figures in the history of Islam. Thus the Khārijites claimed Jābir⁽¹⁾ ibn-Zayd among others; the Mu'tazilites claimed al-Ḥasan⁽²⁾ at Baṣrī and it is not far-fetched to suggest that later Rāfiḍites might have claimed Ṭabarī. This suggestion, however, is weakened by the fact that he is not mentioned in the Shī'ite books I have consulted.

A strong argument could be drawn from the fact that some Shī'ite authors put it frankly that Ṭabarī does not belong to them. Muḥammad ibn-al-Ḥasan ibn-'Alī aṭ-Ṭūsī, a Shī'ite author who died in 460 A.H., tells us that we have to distinguish between Abū-Ja'far Muḥammad ibn-Jarīr ibn-Rustum aṭ-Ṭabarī, to whom we have referred earlier, and Abū-Ja'far Muḥammad ibn-Jarīr aṭ-Ṭabarī, the author of History. The former, he states, was a Shī'ite while the latter was a Sunnite or to quote his expression, 'āmmiyyu-l-madhhab⁽³⁾ i.e. he belongs to the school of the common people.

'Alam al-Hudā Muḥsin al-Kāshānī informs us in his notes

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1. Ash'arī, Maqālāt, 1:109.
 2. Baghdādī, Uṣūl, 307.
 3. Ṭūsī, Fihrist, 281f.

about the Shī'ite books entitled Nadd al-īdāh that a distinction between the two previously mentioned men should be drawn as they represent two different trends of thought. He tells us that he found a document written by Şaffiyyu-d-Dīn Muḥammad ibn-Ma'ād pointing to the fact that Ibn-Rustum aṭ-Ṭabarī belongs to the Imāmite sect while the author of the History belongs to the 'amma.⁽¹⁾ Aghā Buzurg aṭ-Ṭahrānī drew the same distinction between the two scholars.⁽²⁾

The author of A'yān ash-shī'a does not mention our Ṭabarī among the commentators on the Qur'ān who belong to the Shī'ite schools in spite of his violent desire to show that most Muslim scholars held Shī'ite views.⁽³⁾ Not only did he not mention Ṭabarī amongst that group of Shī'ite scholars, but he put it plainly that a distinction must be made between the Shī'ite scholar Abū-Ja'far Muḥammad ibn-Jarīr ibn-Rustum aṭ-Ṭabarī and the Sunnite scholar Abū-Ja'far Muḥammad ibn-Jarīr aṭ-Ṭabarī, the Historian and the Commentator on the Qur'ān.⁽⁴⁾

Also it should be observed that many scholars, ancient

1. Kāshānī, Nadd al-īdāh, 281f.

2. Muṣaffā-l-maqāl, 397f.

3. To demonstrate this he quoted Dhahabī who said that Shī'ism prevailed in the age of the Followers to the extent that if we exclude their narration, riwāya, most of the prophetic traditions would eventually disappear, A'yān ash-Shī'a, 1:43.

4. Ibid., 6:262f.

and modern, do recognize Ṭabarī as one of the leaders of the Sunnite schools taking no notice of the previous discussed accusation of Shī'ism. Thus 'Abd-al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī (d. 429), the author of al-Farq bayn al-firaq and Uṣūl ad-dīn, was proud enough to include Ṭabarī in the Sunnite sphere as one of the renowned scholars. (1) Ṣubḥī Rajab al-Maḥmaṣṣānī (2) regarded Ṭabarī's school as one of the extinct Sunnī schools just as that of Abū-'Amr al-Awzā'ī, for instance. Dr. 'Alī Sāmī an-Nashshār in a critical remark on his sources for the study of the history of Muslim thought, warns us against mixing the works written by Sunnite scholars such as Ṭabarī with those written by Shī'ites such as al-Mas'ūdī (d. 346). (3) Commenting on his Sunnī historical sources for his study of Ismā'ilism, B. Lewis says: "The earliest account we possess is that of the great Sunnī historian Abū-Ja'far Muḥammad ibn-Jarīr aṭ-Ṭabarī (d. 311)". (4)

Ṭabarī considered himself as one of the strict followers of the path, sunna, of the Prophet. For him accusation of bid'a was an unpardonable insult. On his death bed he is reported to have said: "I pardon all my enemies who insulted me with the

1. Farq, 365.

2. Falsafat at-tashrī', 34f.

3. Nashā't al-fikr, 2:547.

4. Ismā'ilism, 3. Ṭabarī died 310 and not 311.

exception of those who accused me of innovation."⁽¹⁾ He even refused to allow those who were believed to be anti-Sunnite to visit him at his house.⁽²⁾

Having come to this point of our discussion we have to remember that the entire issue of the charge of Shī'ism and heresy, ar-rafd wa-l-ilhād,⁽³⁾ against Ṭabarī should be viewed in the light of his age. Ṭabarī's age, the third century of Islam, was marked with political and religious unrest in spite of its fertility in the field of literature.⁽⁴⁾ To mention only a few examples in 247 al-Mutawakkil was murdered and a period of anarchy followed. In 264 Zanj parties were raiding within 17 miles from Baghdād. In 309 al-Ḥallāj was persecuted.

Ṭabarī was brought up in an atmosphere full of controversy. Accusation of unorthodoxy continued to be only a too easy matter. Abū-l-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn-'Umar ad-Daraqūṭnī (d. 385 A.H.) was accused of Shī'ism simply because he committed the poetry of as-Sayyid al-Ḥimyarī, a famous Shī'ite poet, to memory.⁽⁵⁾ Those who accused him could not conceal the fact that he used to learn by heart many poetical works attributed to

1. Yāqūt, Irshād, 6:455.
2. Subkī, Ṭ. ash-Shāfi'iyya, 2:137f.
3. Ibn-al-Jawzī, Muntaẓam, 6:172.
4. See, B. Lewis, Abbāsids, E.I., 1:15ff.
5. Ibn-al-Athīr, Ansāb, 1:404.

various Arab poets. A short commentary by somebody might change the picture completely as far as the position of a theologian is concerned. As-Suyūṭī reveals to us that he continued to consider ar-Rāghib al-Aṣfahānī, the author of the famous Mufradāt, as a Mu'tazilite until he saw a comment by Fakhr ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī, maintaining that he was one of the leaders of the Sunnite school who could be compared to al-Ghazālī. (1) Again, if a theologian held any of the so-called heretical views, he would be ultimately accused of heterodoxy. Al-Māwardī (d. 450), a Shāfi'ite scholar famous for his al-Ahkām as-sultāniyya, was accused of being a Mu'tazilite because he held the view of free will. (2) We will see in the last chapter of this thesis how Ṭabarī's views on ablution opened the way for his being accused of Shī'ism.

All points so far mentioned can be taken as external evidence, as it were, for the groundlessness of the accusation of Ṭabarī as holding the Shī'ite position. We must now proceed to see if we can have any internal evidence in support of the supposition that Ṭabarī was not a Shī'ite. This we will do by looking into his Tafsīr and comparing the ideas developed there to those maintained by the Shī'ites to see if there are any similarities or differences between them. The first question to tackle in this respect is that of the Imamate.

1. Ṭāsh, Miftāḥ as-sa'āda, 1:415.

2. Suyūṭī, T. al-mufasssīrīn, 25.

CHAPTER II

The Doctrine of the Imamate⁽¹⁾

On the death of the Prophet Muslims were confronted with the difficult problem of choosing somebody to succeed him. Muslim thinkers differed widely in their arguments and conclusions as to who was entitled to the office of al-imāma al-kubrā i.e. the leadership of Muslim community both secularly and spiritually. Three names were suggested, namely, Abū-Bakr ibn-Abī-Quhāfa, 'Alī ibn-Abī-Ṭālib and al-'Abbās ibn-'Abd-al-Muṭṭalib. The last name seems to be introduced at a later stage to have a better proof of the rights of the Abbasid dynasty.⁽²⁾ The real controversy which divided Muslims into two major sects up to the present day is connected with the names of the first two i.e. Abū-Bakr and 'Alī. The essence of the dispute between the Shī'ites and the Sunnites is thus political in the main.

Although some of the Sunnites endeavoured to prove that the Prophet did nominate Abū-Bakr to succeed him by ordering that he

1. For the imamate see: Ibn-Ḥazm, Fiṣal, 4:87ff; Shahrastānī, Milal, 1:27 ff; Rāzī, al-Arba'īn, 438 ff; Bazdawī, Uṣūl, 178 ff; D.M. Donaldson, The Shī'a doctrine of the imamate, M.W., XXI: 14-23 and The Shī'ite religion, 1 ff.
2. See M.W. Watt, Rāfiqites, 118.

should lead the prayer, the majority seem to hold the view that the Prophet died making no mention of who would take over the office of the Caliphate. The task of choosing somebody to succeed the Prophet was left entirely to the decision of the Muslim community. Thus Abū-Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmān and 'Alī were chosen one after the other. To acknowledge the authority of these men in that order became one of the fundamental issues of theology. To question the legitimacy of any of the four Caliphs would be an unforgiveable heresy. This recognition of the four Caliphs is one of the important marks which distinguishes a Sunnite from the rest of the heretical groups. (1)

The Shī'ites, specially the Imāmites, rejected the first three Caliphs who, according to their belief, clung to illegal power. Abhorred historical figures mentioned in the Qur'an such as Pharaoh and Haman stand for the tribes of Taym and 'Adī to which the first two Caliphs belong. (2) "The Faṭimids refused to accept Traditions derived from the first three Caliphs or the other Companions of the Prophet. They only regarded as authoritative things which were said or done either by Muḥammad himself, or by members of his family." (3) This was true of almost all the Shī'ites and more will be said in this respect when we come

1. Ṭaḥāwī, Bayān, 12.

2. Shabbir, Ḥaqq, 2:38.

3. M.W., L:31; for early Shī'ite traditionists see D.M. Donaldson, The Shī'ite religion, 284-289.

to the discussion of the doctrine of the infallibility of the imams.

The Sunnites, Murjites, Shī'ites and Kharijites, with the exception of the Najadāt sub-division, agreed on the question of the affirmation and necessity of the imamate post.⁽¹⁾ The Shī'ites, however, stressed its importance more than any other group. According to them the imamate is the very foundation of Islam. It is a root, aṣl and not a branch, far' of the religion.⁽²⁾ The determination of such a vital matter as the imamate by an assembly of the people is an absurdity as far as the Shī'ites are concerned. Since it is an aṣl, it should be determined by the Prophet himself. Again every Caliph must designate his successor. No one is to be established as an imām without the designation or naṣṣ of his predecessor.⁽³⁾

There is a considerable difference between the Shī'ites and the Sunnites concerning the assessment of the amount of importance attached to the imamate. Considering it as a far',⁽⁴⁾ of the religion, the Sunnites maintained that it could be and in fact was determined by the Muslim community. The Shī'ites held that the Muslim community had nothing to do with it. It was the Prophet himself who settled the question of the imamate

1. Ibn-Ḥazm, Fiṣal, 4:87.

2. Mashkūr, Commentary on al-Qummī maqālāt, 154f.

3. Majlisī, Bihār, 10:451.

4. Rāzī, Arba'īn, 456.

on the occasion of ghadīr Khumm i.e. the Pond of Khumm. (1)

The tradition of ghadīr Khumm plays a central role in the Shī'ite literature. This was the place where, it is held, the Prophet handed down the Caliphate to 'Alī Ibn-Abī-Ṭālib and instructed every individual Muslim to obey him. The Prophet, it is assumed, took 'Alī by the hand and said, "whoever I protect, 'Alī protects - man kunt^u mawlāh^u fa 'Alī^{yn} mawlāh^u." (2) Ṭabarī was one of those who held fast to this prophetic tradition. (3) The Shī'ites are so proud to have among the transmitters and advocates of the tradition of al-ghadīr a weighty and respected intellectual figure like Ṭabarī. (4)

Ṭabarī, thus, "maintained with some vehemence the tradition whereon the Shī'a base 'Alī's appointment to the succession." (5) He even went as far as compiling a vast book entitled, Aḥādīth al-ghadīr. Ṭabarī came to know that some Muslim scholars disputed the authenticity of the tradition of al-ghadīr. They argued that 'Alī was sent by the Prophet on an expedition to Yemen; he never witnessed the

1. This is a place which lies between Mecca and Medina, Ibn-al-Athīr, Gharīb al-ḥadīth, 1:358.

2. See, for example, Nu'mān, Da'ā'im, 1:20f; Shahrastānī, Milal, 1:220.

3. Yāqūt, Irshād, 6:455; Al-Amīnī, Ghadīr, 1:41; Margoliouth, Lectures, 108.

4. Ṭūsī, Fihrist, 281; Al-Amīnī, Ghadīr, 1:100.

5. Margoliouth, Lectures, 108.

presence of the Prophet at the alleged place. To state that the Prophet took the hand of 'Alī and said so and so is, therefore, no more than a mere lie. Ṭabarī was provoked by such assertions and felt it his duty to write a book clarifying the matter and removing doubts. He had a firm belief that the Prophet did utter these words on the episode of ghadīr Khumm. This, of course, had everything to do with his accusation of Shī'ite tendencies.

It is true that Ṭabarī believed strongly in the tradition of al-ghadīr. He had not the least doubt that the Prophet did speak those words. This by itself was more than enough to charge Ṭabarī with Shī'ism in that controversial atmosphere he found himself in. The traditionist Abū-'Abd-Allāh al-Ḥākim, the author of al-Mustadrak, admired both Abū-Bakr and 'Umar but he claimed that the Prophet appointed 'Alī to succeed him. This, of course, was a more daring view than that of Ṭabarī and because of it he was accused of Shī'ism. (1)

Ṭabarī, as we will see later, did not accept the view expressed by the Shī'ites and Abū-'Abd-Allāh al-Ḥākim but in spite of this his accusation seems to spring from similar fountains. Even some modern writers appear to follow the same line of argument. Since he accepted, they argue, the tradition of al-ghadīr, he must have been a Shī'ite sympathiser.

1. Ibn-al-Jazarī, Nihāya, 2:185.

Laoust

H. Laoust pointed out that Ṭabarī was the author of a work on the episode of the Pond of Khumm, and in consequence he must have had some secret sympathy with the Shī'ite movement. (1)

What is really important, however, is the significance attached to the words ascribed to the Prophet. Muslims reacted to them differently. Some of them swept away the tradition altogether. They denied the very fact that the Prophet ever pronounced it. (2) The majority, including Ṭabarī, seemed to accept its authentic attribution to the Prophet. They, on the other hand, differed greatly on its interpretation. (3) The Rawāfiq, some of the Qadarites and some of the Mu'tazilites base their argument defending 'Alī's right to succeed the Prophet on this tradition. The tradition means for them that 'Alī is the legitimate representative of the Prophet. Aqāma maqāma^{hu} is the usual pattern of expressing this principal concept. The Shī'ites are, of course, the strongest and most interested group in this tradition. Some of them even claimed that the message of the Prophet was over since he entrusted 'Alī with the imamate on the occasion of the ghadīr. From that day on, the Prophet himself should have followed the new leader i.e. 'Alī. (4) Others charged 'Alī himself with disbelief

1. D. Sourdel, R.E.I., XXXVI: 177.

2. Ibn-Ḥazm, Fīṣal, 4:148.

3. See, for instance, Rāzī, Arba'īn, 450; Bazdawī, Uṣūl, 184.

4. Qummī, Maqālāt, 83.

because he did not fight out his just cause. (1)

Those of the Sunnites who accepted the tradition held, on the other hand, that it aimed at nothing more than showing the high position enjoyed by 'Alī in the eyes of the Prophet. Its only function was to contribute to 'Alī's religious prestige. To load the simple words of the Prophet with complicated and pre-conceived doctrines would be a contemptuous way of dealing with the holy Prophetic traditions. No inference, they held, can ever be drawn from it that the Prophet had designated 'Alī to succeed him. (2) Ṭabarī certainly belongs to this group. He refused to label the tradition as being falsely attributed to the Prophet. But he was not prepared to misinterpret the words of the Prophet; he was too pious to do so. Although he accepted the ghadīr as a genuine Prophetic tradition, he refused to digest the notion that the Prophet nominated 'Alī as his successor. In his Tafsīr he made 'Alī himself deny such a nomination. (3)

It is true that Ṭabarī was a fervent admirer of 'Alī ibn-Abī-Tālib. He wrote a book entitled Fadā'il 'Alī or the Merits of 'Alī. But to admire the merits of 'Alī does

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1. Ibn-Khaldūn, Lubāb al-muḥaṣṣal, 128.
 2. Rāzī, Arba'īn, 463.
 3. 9:45.

not necessarily mean that he should look down on the rest of the Companions of the Prophet, not to mention the first three Caliphs. Ṭabarī was certainly not prepared to go that far. He wrote a treatise addressed to the people of his native country Ṭabaristān entitled at-Tabṣīr. He wrote that treatise when he saw that the habit of cursing the first two Caliphs, Abū-Bakr and 'Umar, was prevailing there.⁽¹⁾ He did all in his power to check that habit but at last, failing to control it, he had to flee for his own life.⁽²⁾

The third Caliph, 'Uthmān, who was abhorred by the Shī'ites for his edition of the Qur'ānic text,⁽³⁾ was highly praised by Ṭabarī for the magnificent job he had done. This edition, Ṭabarī maintained, should be adhered to by every member of the Muslim community. Ṭabarī calls 'Uthmān the prince of the believers and the kind adviser of the community. "Then the prince of the believers, being the kind adviser of the community, an-nāṣiḥ ash-shafīq, chose for them - out of charity - that reading which should be practised by all."⁽⁴⁾ The murder of 'Uthmān, Ṭabarī relates, brought disaster upon Muslims. God sent down fear on them because of their terrible act.⁽⁵⁾

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1. Ṭabaristān was ruled by the Shī'ites for a considerable period of time - Macdonald, Development, 36. For the House of Sayyids who ruled Ṭabaristān see Ibn-Isfandiyyār, H. of Ṭabaristān, 47-58.
 2. Yāqūt, Irshād, 6:456; Margoliouth, Lectures, 108.
 3. Walter C. Klein, Introduction to kitāb al-ibānah, 9.
 4. Ṭ.T., 1:21.
 5. Ibid., 18:110.

Indeed, on the question of the imamate, Ṭabarī keeps the traditional Sunnite view defending the legitimacy of the first four Caliphates whose respective merits correspond to the chronological order of their reigns. The fact that he, in his creed, gave the title of amīr al-mu'minīn, the prince of the believers, to 'Alī ibn-Abī-Ṭālīb and not to the first three Caliphs has little or no significance at all.⁽¹⁾ In his Tafsīr, as we have just seen, he addressed 'Uthmān by exactly the same title. He openly expressed the view that all of the first three Caliphs were more exalted than the fourth i.e. 'Alī. Ibn-Ḥazm relates, on the authority of Ṭabarī, through the channel of his disciple Aḥmad ibn-al-Faḍl ad-Dīnawarī,⁽²⁾ that 'Ā'isha, the wife of the Prophet, had greater merits than 'Alī.⁽³⁾

The association or Walāya with 'Alī and his Household necessarily implies in the Shī'ite theology dissociation or barā'a from other Muslims who do not belong to them.⁽⁴⁾ Half of the Qur'ān is said to have been revealed in connection with 'Alī and his House from one side and their enemies from the other side.⁽⁵⁾ Ṭabarī was not prepared to follow the

1. R.E.I., XXXVI:197.

2. For ad-Dīnawarī see, Ḥumaydī, Jadhwat al-muqtabis, 131.

3. Fīṣal, 4:134.

4. Goldziher, Vorlesungen, 216.

5. Ibn-Furāt, Tafsīr, 1.

Shī'ites on this primary issue of association and dissociation. In fact he charged the Rawāfiḍ, who rejected Abū-Bakr and others, with disbelief. He refused to accept their word on testimony or shahāda as he considered them completely untrustworthy. (1)

Ṭabarī's commentary on the Qur'ānic verses which deal, or are held to deal, with the question of the imamate differs considerably from those of the Shī'ites. To pick up some examples let us first have a look at the last two verses of the chapter of al-Fātiḥa or the Opening of the Book. The verses read as follows: "show us the straight path, the path of those whom Thou hast favoured" (Q.1:5-6). Ṭabarī put it crystal clear that the 'straight path' mentioned in these verses is that of the Prophet, Abū-Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmān, 'Alī and every pious man. (2) It is worth mentioning that Ṭabarī made it obvious that it was his conviction that Abū-Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthmān were the three immediate legitimate Caliphs after the Prophet. It is, indeed, impossible to associate a man with such a conviction with the Shī'ite movement whose first objective was to vindicate the right of 'Alī to succeed the Prophet.

The difference between Ṭabarī and the Shī'ites can best

1. Yāqūt, Irshād, 6:454.

2. Ṭ.T, 1:56.

be demonstrated by looking into a Shī'ite commentary dwelling upon the same verses mentioned above. Let this commentary be that of Ibn-Furāt, a traditionist of the same generation of Ṭabarī. For Ibn-Furāt, 'the straight path' mentioned in (Q.1:5-6) is the path of 'Alī and his followers. He claimed that the privilege of being the only followers of the straight path had been given to 'Alī and his associates by the Prophet himself. (1)

There is no doubt in the minds of the Shī'ites that 'Alī and those who recognized his imamate, immediately after the death of the prophet, are the only rightly guided people. They commonly share this view throughout their history. Commenting on the same verses a recent Shī'ite author says, "this guidance on the straight path is frequently spoken of as a matter of grace to the Prophets. The right path in this sense is spiritual attachment to the Prophets and imams; and thus it is easy to understand how in the traditions the right path is identified with our Lord 'Alī." (2) The writer goes on to assert in conclusion that "it is, therefore, clear that the path referred to is the path of the infallible Prophet and the infallible imams after him, and it is those who are meant

1. Ibn-Furāt, Tafsīr, 2.

2. M.W., XIX:38.

with those favoured of God in this verse..."(1)

To break with the Shī'ites on the doctrine of the imamate is to break with them on the most crucial foundation upon which almost all of their theology and history is built. Many of the theological differences, as we shall see in the chapters of Infallibility and Return, are closely or distantly related to the problem of the imamate. For the Shī'ites the belief in the doctrine of the imamate is an integral and absolutely indispensable part of faith. (2) The belief in the unity of God, the prophethood of Muḥammad, the reality of Heaven and Hell, Resurrection of the dead, the coming of the Hour together with the belief in the imams comprise their faith. Every individual believer is required to know, therefore, the imām of his age and submit to his unquestionable authority. Without this firm belief in the imams faith can by no means be complete. (3) The insistence of the Shī'ites on the necessity of the association of the true believers with the imams can never be overestimated. It led many Shī'ite extremists not to perform their religious duties. Prayer, fasting, pilgrimage and the rest of the religious obligations can be done away with

1. M.W., XIX:39.

2. The definition of 'faith' is one of controversial issues in Islam see Ibn-Ḥazm, Fiṣal, 2:111f and 3:188ff; Qaṣṭalānī, Irshād, 1:85f; Nisābūrī, Raghā'ib, 1:129ff.

3. See, for example, Ibn-Furāt, Tafsīr, 32 and 91; Nu'mān, Da'a'im, 1:3 ff; Kāzīmī, Khaṣā'is ash-shī'a, 27.

if association with the imams is carried out. (1)

In Ṭabarī's Tafsīr we find no such emphasis on the doctrine of the imamate as an article of faith. He held the traditional view so far as the question of faith is concerned. (2) He insisted that neither belief in the heart nor utterance by the tongue is sufficient to complete one's faith. The outward actions and performances are of utmost importance for him. All of the three, belief, utterance and actions comprise faith. If any of these three elements proves to be lacking, faith itself is wanting. *عامة المتوكلين*

The Shī'ites attempted to draw evidences from the Qur'ān to justify their views about the imamate. We have seen their interpretation of the verses of al-fātiḥa, and the unbridgeable gulf separating Ṭabarī's position from their own. A few other examples will be given. The verse, "O ye who believe! obey God and obey the messenger and those of you who are in authority" (Q. IV:59) is interpreted by Muslim scholars in either of two ways: (a) "those of you who are in authority" refers to Muslim rulers, (b) the phrase refers to Muslim savants and jurists because elsewhere the Qur'ān says, "and if any tidings, whether of safety or fear, come unto them, they noise it abroad, whereas if they had referred it to the messenger and such of them as in authority, those among them who are able to think out the matter would have

1. Qummī, Maqālāt, 51f; see also B. Lewis, Isma'ilism, 29.

2. See Ṭ.T., 1:90; 2:11, 58 and 225; 8:73.

known it." (Q.IV:83) Both of these views are represented in Ṭabarī's Tafsīr.⁽¹⁾ The Shī'ites are very definite on this point. It is the imams, no doubt, who are meant by the verse.⁽²⁾ Ṭabarī favoured the first interpretation that the verse in question referred to Muslim rulers. This is because, he argued, the Prophet ordered several times that they should be obeyed. Ṭabarī seemed to hold the traditional view that the rulers, whether they were themselves pious or not, must be obeyed provided that they should not legislate ungodly things, e.g. they can drink wine themselves but out of hand they cannot be obeyed if they instructed others to drink it. The rulers spoken about in Ṭabarī's Tafsīr are presumably those chosen by the Muslim community or, to be more precise, those who happened to assume power over their opponents. Certainly, they are not the infallible imams of the Shī'ites. They may be good or wicked, barr or fājir.⁽³⁾

Another Qur'ānic verse which the Shī'ites hold as evidence that 'Alī was the imām with whom believers should associate themselves is this. "Your friend can be only God; and his messenger and those who believe, who establish worship and pay the poor-due, and bow down (in prayer)" (Q.V:55). 'Alī, during his prayer, is reported to have given a ring to a beggar. He was too charitable

1. 5:87-89.

2. See, for example, Ibn-Furāt, Tafsīr, 28; Nu'mān, Da'ā'im, 1:25ff.

3. Ṭ.T, 5:89.

to wait until his prayer was over. This verse is, therefore, revealed on that occasion. The Shi'ites assert as true that the verse also includes the descendents of 'Alī because they are the only legitimate imams. (1) Ṭabarī kept up the view that the verse referred to the bulk of the believers who were described by their Lord as performers of prayer and givers of alms. This, however, did not prevent him for disclosing the views of others who identified the verse with either 'Ubāda ibn-aṣ-Ṣāmit or 'Alī ibn-Abī-Ṭālib. (2)

"This day have I perfected your religion for you and completed My favour unto you, and have chosen for you as religion al-Islām" (Q.V:3) is frequently quoted by the Shi'ites. The last item, they say, of faith is the association with the imāms. The verse, they continue, is revealed on the occasion of ghadīr Khumm to which we have referred earlier. Before the appointment of 'Alī to the Caliphate, it would be next to impossible to proclaim the completeness of religion. By the action of ghadīr Khumm Islam had attained its maximum possible degree of perfection. No religious duty after that of the attachment to the imams has been imposed upon Muslims ever since. Ṭabarī took a completely different stand as far as this verse is concerned. According to him the verse should be understood in terms of the management of

1. Nu'mān, Da'ā'im, 1:20

2. Ṭ.T, 6:165.

Muslims to enter Mecca mixing with none of the disbelievers. This is not to imagine that no legislative verse is revealed after that verse. On the contrary, it is a well-established fact that the Qur'ān continued to be revealed throughout the lifetime of the Prophet; in his last days it became even more frequent. (1)

Another verse connected with the doctrine of the imamate goes as follows "Thou art a warner only, and for every folk a guide" (Q.XIII:7). Ibn-'Abbās is reported to have said that the Prophet pointed out to 'Alī ibn-Abī-Ṭālib and said: "I am the warner and you are the guide who will lead the people after my departure." The Shī'ites claim that nobody except 'Alī ibn-Abī-Ṭālib is meant with the word 'guide' mentioned in the verse. (2) Ṭabarī disagrees both with the report of Ibn-'Abbās and the view of the Shī'ites. Following his procedure of exposing Qur'ānic terms to all possible meanings, he refused to confine the word 'guide' to 'Alī ibn-Abī-Ṭālib. For him the word 'guide' can be applicable to God, Prophets or even ordinary religious leaders capable of coping with the problems involved. (3)

The verse, "is he (to be counted equal with them) who relieth on a clear proof from his Lord, and a witness, shāhid from him reciteth it" (Q.XI:17) led to a great deal of controversy.

1. Ṭ.T, 6:45.

2. Ibn-Furāt, Tafsīr, 76.

3. Ṭ.T, 13:63f.

Muslims differed vastly in its interpretation. The Shī'ites claim that the first part of the verse points to the Prophet whereas the second part deals with his son-in-law 'Alī ibn-Abī-Ṭālib. (1) Ṭabarī would not accept that 'Alī was meant by the word 'witness' or shāhid mentioned in the verse. It was the angel Gabrail, as can be deduced from the last part of the verse, who was meant by it. 'Alī himself was made by Ṭabarī to deny any sort of connection with this verse. (2)

Also, the Shī'ites argue that the question of who is legally entitled to the leadership of the community cannot be looked at apart from the matter of blood relationship with its founder i.e. the Prophet. The verse, "and those who are akin are nearer one to another in the ordinance of God" (Q.VIII:75) forms, therefore, a strong foundation for their argument that 'Alī and his descendants are legally entitled to carry out the imamate responsibilities. (3) Ṭabarī looks at the verse from a different angle. He tells us that inheritance in the pre-Islamic period was a subject of contract between two agreeable persons not necessarily having blood tie. This custom, he adds, was abolished by the verse concerned. The verse, as far as one could gather from Ṭabarī's view as expressed in his Tafsīr, (4) has nothing to

1. Nu'mān, Da'ā'im, 1:24f.

2. Ṭ.T., 12:10f.

3. Ibn-Furāt, Tafsīr, 49; Ibn-Ḥazm, Fīṣal, 4:93.

4. 10:36.

do with governmental or political affairs.

The Shī'ites were very eager to find representation for their views about the imamate in the Qur'ān. They have even interpolated some words in some passages of the Qur'ān adding to the reputation of 'Alī and his Family. Thus the verse "God is the light of the heavens and the earth; The similitude of His light is as a niche wherein is a lamp..." (Q. XXIV:35) is read by them as follows: "God is the light of the heavens and the earth; the similitude of the light of one who believes in Him and love the people of the House of his Apostle is as a niche wherein is a lamp....".⁽¹⁾ The inventive character of such a reading is too transparent to need a comment and Ṭabarī made no mention of it. A more intelligent one is Ilyāsīn being changed into Āl yāsīn i.e. Āl Muḥammad to which Ṭabarī strongly objected.⁽²⁾ This, however, will be discussed more fully in the next chapter which deals with the infallibility of the imams.

A verse as general as "O ye who believe! Be careful of your duty to God, and be with the truthful" (Q. IX:119) is restricted by the Shī'ites to 'Alī and his party to the exclusion of other Muslims.⁽³⁾ For Ṭabarī the verse was a command to be with the Prophet, Abū-Bakr, 'Umar and the rest of the Companions.⁽⁴⁾

1. A. Jeffery, Materials, 65.

2. Ṭ.T, 23:55f.

3. Ibn-Furāt, Tafsīr, 53; Nu'mān, Da'ā'im, 1:27.

4. Ṭ.T, 11:40.

Muhammad ibn-'Alī, known as al-Bāqir and one of the Twelve imāms, (1) is reported to have said that the Prophet told 'Alī that the verse "those who believe and do good works are the best of created beings" (Q.XCVIII:7) refers to him and his supporters. Ṭabarī was not prepared to accept this tradition which, in his view, was wrongly attributed to the Prophet. The verse, he asserted, referred to every believer who has faith in God and his Apostle and who acts in accordance with the Islamic teachings. (2)

As-Suddī, the famous Shī'ite commentator, held that the verse "those who disbelieve spend their wealth in order that they may debar man from the way of God" (Q.VIII:36) points to Abū-Sufyān ibn-Ḥarb, the father of Mu'āwiya, in particular. Ṭabarī refused to accept this. The verse should be open to include every disbeliever who spends his money to serve an ungodly aim (Ṭ.T, 9:149). Restriction of general verses to a limited sense without unshakeable evidence was thus utterly rejected by Ṭabarī.

Also, if the Qur'ān is taken in its obvious sense, the doctrine of the imamate, as explained by the Shī'ites, could hardly be drawn out of it. The Shī'ites are, therefore driven to seek

1. These are: 'Alī ibn-Abī-Ṭālib, Ḥasan ibn-'Alī, Ḥusayn ibn-'Alī, 'Alī ibn-al-Ḥusayn ibn-'Alī, Muḥammad Ibn-'Alī ibn-al-Ḥusayn, Ja'far ibn-Muḥammad ibn-'Alī, Mūṣa al-Kāẓim, 'Alī ibn-Mūsā al-Kāẓim, Muḥammad ibn-'Alī ibn-Mūsā, 'Alī ibn-Muḥammad ibn-'Alī ibn-Mūsā, Ḥasan al-'Askarī and Muḥammad ibn-al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī, the expected Mahdī. The Seveners accepted the first six imāms in addition to Ismā'il ibn-Ja'far.

2. Ṭ.T, 30:146.

out an inner sense of the verses of the Qur'ān. For some of them every form of worship has an inner and outer meaning. (1) The verse, "When He made the slumber fall upon you as a reassurance from Him and sent down water from the sky upon you, that thereby He might purify you ..." (Q.VIII:11) should not be taken on its face value. It has a deep inner meaning. The sky in the bāṭin stands for the Prophet while the water stands for 'Alī. It follows from this interpretation that 'Alī is but a part of the Prophet. (2) This spiritual relationship with the Prophet is of special importance when we come to the discussion of the infallibility of the imams and how the Muḥammadan light is passed from one imām to another.

The obvious sense of the Qur'ān has also to be sacrificed in "and when our clear revelations are recited unto them they who look not for the meeting with us say: Bring a Qur'ān other than this or change it. Say: It is not for me to change it of my own accord." (Q.X: 16) According to a Shī'ite commentary the verse is talking about the request of the enemies of God (i.e. anti-Shī'ites) that the Prophet might pass the office of the imamate into the hands of somebody other than 'Alī ibn-Abī-Ṭālib. (3)

Ṭabarī was very systematic and persistent in rejecting

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1. Nawbakhtī, Firaq, 63.
 2. Ibn-Furāt, Tafsīr, 50.
 3. Ibn-Furāt, Tafsīr, 62.

the so-called inner meaning of the Qur'ān. The obvious meaning should be adhered to whenever it is possible. Without a rational necessity or an indication from the Prophet no inner sense of the Qur'ān is tolerated. The Qur'ān says: "By the fig and the olive, by Mount Sinai and by this land made safe" (Q.XCV:1-3). All of these things mentioned in the verse, the Shī'ites claim, are symbolic. The fig stands for 'Alī, the olive for al-Ḥasan, Mount Sinai for al-Ḥusayn and the land made safe for Muḥammad ibn-al-Ḥanafiyya. (1) Aṭ-Ṭabarī evidently challenged this interpretation when he insisted that the fig was the fruit we eat, the olive was that from which oil was derived, Mount Sinai was the famous mountain in Palestine and the land made safe was Mecca. (2) He was thus very anxious to give each word its exact connotation in order to keep the Qur'ān away from misinterpretation. He did everything in his power to protect it from dangerous interpretations dictated by various religious and political influences. An example of such interpretation is this. The thousand months mentioned in the verse "The Night of Power is better than a thousand months" (Q. XCVII:3) are taken by some Shī'ites to stand for the reign of the Umayyids, their direct opponents. Ṭabarī rejected this vehemently. For him these were absurd assertions, da'āwī ma'ānⁱⁿ bāṭila, having no proof at all. Both reason and revelation

1. Qummī, Maqālāt, 30.

2. T.T, 30:131-133.

الاستغناء
 ١٠ حكمه وفضلته انما هو باسمه الجليل
 (١٢٠ مشهور في الروايات)

do not point to them. The verse, he remarks, simply means that doing good work on the Night of Power was better than doing the same work throughout the period of a thousand ordinary months. (1)

Ṭabarī thus seems to meet the extravagant allegations of the Shī'ites made on behalf of their imams by formulating two important principles:- (a) the general verses of the Qur'ān must be treated in accordance with their general character; no one except God or his Prophet has the right of restricting them to any particular meanings, (b) the verses of the Qur'ān must be taken in their obvious senses; all groundless inner senses should be vigorously rejected.

The idea of the imamate crept from the domain of theology and politics to that of jurisprudence. It is a well-known fact that a Muslim is permitted to take forbidable foods such as pork, for instance, if he fears death of hunger. This is based on the verse "He hath forbidden you only carrion, and blood, and swineflesh, and that which hath been immolated to (the name of) any other than God. But he who is driven by necessity, neither craving nor transgressing, it is no sin for him" (Q.II:173). For the Shī'ites those who fail to acknowledge the authority of the imam and obey his orders are not excusable in eating prohibited foods even though they are to endanger their very lives. (2)

1. Ṭ.T, 30:143.

2. Nisābūrī, Raghā'ib, 2:104.



Ṭabarī rejected the view presented by the Shī'ites. He pointed out that the phrase "neither craving nor transgressing" should be understood in the light of the entire verse. The phrase, he commented, deals with those who transgress the Law by eating forbiddable things knowing that they enjoy other means by which they could possibly survive. Ṭabarī was no anarchist. Defying the authority of the legitimate imam, he argued, was a sin but it could not be cured by committing an even graver sin namely killing one's self. (1)

Ṭabarī seemed to divert grossly from the Shī'ite teachings on the imamate. Nevertheless he was prepared to give them full opportunity in his Tafsīr to express their views in complete freedom. He honestly presented their arguments but this did not mean that he should not refute them. Indeed in most cases, as we have seen, he does and sometimes in a bitter way e.g. these are absurd assertions having no justification or foundation either in reason or revelation. (2)

On the authority of his renowned teacher Muḥammad ibn-Ḥumayd ar-Rāzī, whom we referred to in the previous chapter, and other authorities with Shī'ite inclinations, Ṭabarī was ready to put forward the arguments and reports which support the Shī'ites case. A few examples may suffice here. The Shī'ites claim that

1. T.T., 2:49f.

2. Ibid., 30:143.

the right of 'Alī to succeed the Prophet is demonstrated by the fact that the Prophet first commanded Abū-Bakr to recite the Chapter of Immunity for the Arabs of Mecca. Later he shifted the responsibility of the recitation from Abū-Bakr to 'Alī. This was because he had been informed by God not to endow a man who was not of his own family with such a favour. ⁽¹⁾ Such a report certainly gives the Shī'ites every kind of pride and satisfaction. Ṭabarī mentions it in detail. ⁽²⁾ It is significant, however, to notice that he made an attempt to demonstrate the great position acquired by Abū-Bakr, e.g. he is the man who accompanied the Prophet in his sacred journey from Mecca to Medina and will be his sole companion on the Pool in the hereafter, ṣāhibuh^u 'alā al-ḥawḍ.

When the verse "And whoso disputeth with thee concerning him, after the knowledge which hath come unto thee, say (unto him): come! We will summon our sons and your sons, and our women and your women, and ourselves and yourselves and we will pray humbly (to our Lord) and (solemnly) invoke the curse of God upon those who lie." (Q. III:61) was revealed to the Prophet, he is reported to have summoned 'Alī, his wife and his children. This is another proof, the Shī'ites hold, that 'Alī represents an inseparable part of the 'self' of the Prophet (ourselves). ⁽³⁾ No-one except 'Alī is gifted with such a privilege. It is, there-

1. Nu'mān, Da'ā'im, 1:23; M.W., XXI:15.

2. Ṭ.T, 10:41f.

3. Nu'mān, Da'ā'im, 1:22; Ibn-Furāt, Tafsīr, 14. The Sunnites maintain that the term (ourselves) include all the relatives of the Prophet and does not refer to 'Alī alone, Rāzī, Arba'īn, 476.

fore, illogical to pass the imamate to any other than 'Alī. The report itself was introduced by Ṭabarī but whether he accepted the interpretation given to it by the Shī'ites or not remains unclear.⁽¹⁾

It is thus true that we find references to the Shī'ite doctrine of the imamate here and there in Ṭabarī's Tafsīr. We meet with al-Kumayt al-Asadī, the author of the well-known poetic work al-Hāshimiyāt, strongly advocating the Shī'ite claim to the Caliphate.⁽²⁾ Abū-l-Aswad ad-Du'alī, whom al-Jāhiz considered as a leader in Shī'ism,⁽³⁾ is quoted by Ṭabarī as praising 'Alī and giving him the title of al-wasī⁽⁴⁾ i.e. the one appointed by the Prophet to take up responsibility after him. These are but few examples out of many but we have to bear in mind that commentators usually introduce poetry in order to elucidate the meaning of the various Qur'ānic verses concerned. Thus Fakhr ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī (d. 606 A.H.), for example, presented two poetic lines ascribed to Ḥassān ibn-Thābit, the poet of the Prophet, which can be translated as follows: "I never expected that the Caliphate would pass away from the hands of 'Alī who was the first to perform prayer and the possessor of the most profound knowledge of

1. Ṭ.T, 3:191.

2. Ṭ.T, 24:24.

3. Quoted at the commencement of Abū-l-Aswad ad-Du'alī Dīwān edited by 'Abd-l-Karīm ad-Diḥbilī, Baghdād, 1954.

4. Ṭ.T, 1:274.

the Qur'ān and the sunna."⁽¹⁾

These are two of the most important evidences, namely historical background and religious knowledge, presented by the Shī'ites to support their thesis that 'Alī has the legitimate right to take over after the Prophet. Nevertheless no one accused Rāzī of Shī'ism because he quoted pro-Shī'ite poetry. In fact he seized every opportunity to refute them in his books.⁽²⁾ The introduction by Ṭabarī, therefore, of Shī'ite poetry defending the imamate of 'Alī and his House is no proof that he had Shī'ite propensity. *wasal fī qā'id*

When Ṭabarī presented religious or political poetry praising an idea or a person, he did not act as a propaganda machine. What he was really interested in was the explanation of the meaning of the Qur'ānic verses rather than spreading the views expressed by these poets. His position can best be appreciated when we come to know that he introduced in his Tafsīr both anti- and pro-Shī'ite poetry. We find, for instance, Qays ar-Ruqayyāt, the famous poet of the Umayyid era, praising Banū-Umayya, the direct enemies of 'Alī's supporters, for being able to master self-control and contain their anger.⁽³⁾

It is to be admitted, however, that some pieces of information which bear their obvious Shī'ite marks on them find

1. Mafātīḥ al-ghayb, 1:281.
2. See, for example, al-Arba'īn, 439 ff.
3. Ṭ.T, 6:167.

their way into Ṭabarī's Tafsīr. Some of these are doubtful Shī'ite legends which cannot be attested historically. They are presumably invented to display the assumed miraculous nature of their imams. An outstanding example was presented by as-Suddī when he reported that on the day of the death of al-Ḥusayn ibn-'Alī the sky changed into a red colour as an indication of sadness and misery. (1) Ṭabarī often maintained silence with regard to information which had no direct implication on legal and practical issues such as this one and that conveyed by the Jews concerning ancient history.

Ṭabarī's Tafsīr is also full of views attributed to Shī'ite imams (2) such as Muḥammad ibn-al-Ḥanafiyya, 'Alī ibn-al-Ḥusayn, known as Zayn al-'Ābidīn, Zayd ibn-'Alī ibn-al-Ḥusayn, Muḥammad ibn-'Alī ibn-al-Ḥusayn, known as al-Bāqir and Ja'far ibn-Muḥammad ibn-'Alī known as aṣ-Ṣādiq and considered to be the father of the Twelver's school of law and theology. The fact that Ṭabarī quoted and respected the views of all of these men who acquired an exalted place in Shī'ism and its history is not conclusive evidence for Shī'ite affection. Muslim Sunnite scholars used to speak very highly of them. (3) They only resent the unbelievable exaggerations about their merits such as being

1. Ṭ.T, 25:68.

2. See, for example, 2:19; 2:213; 3:191; 6:165; 10:41; 11:46; 11:49; 14:24; 15:50; 30:146 etc.

3. See, for instance, Nawawī, Tahdhīb, 1:343; Ibn-al-Jazarī, Nihāya, 2:202 and 204.

infallible which are developed by their followers.

Ṭabarī represented some of these Shī'ite leaders as holding the Sunnite views about the imamate. Kuthayyir an-Nawwā', Ṭabarī relates, asked Abū-Ja'far Muḥammad ibn-'Alī whether he associated himself with Abū-Bakr and 'Umar or not. Abū-Ja'far replied in the affirmative adding that he would be utterly misguided if he did otherwise. Then he went on to command the questioner to honour them. If you do as I tell you, he said, nothing disastrous will happen to you. ⁽¹⁾ Nonetheless this passing of information of obvious Shī'ite character without sometimes the least comment or objection from Ṭabarī's side, made him run the risk of being accused of Shī'ism by enemies who were always ready to give a false and one-sided impression.

1. Ṭ.T, 14:24.

CHAPTER III

The Doctrine of the Infallibility

The Shī'ites, especially the Twelvers, came to adopt a strange view about their imams. The Shī'ite imams are said to be essentially and absolutely infallible. Both the Imāmiyya and the Bāṭiniyya claimed infallibility even for the representatives of the imams. Some extremists held the view that men who are in charge of the safety and guard of imams must also be entirely infallible. (1)

The infallibility or 'iṣma is taken as an inner attribute which nobody except God could notice and realize. (2) This is one of the strongest arguments presented by the Shī'ites that an imām should not be chosen by the people. Such a momentous issue as the imamate, which we have just been dealing with, can only be determined by God who knows the abilities and qualities of his creatures. The imams, we are told, are the "proofs", ḥujaj, of God against his slaves, that is, men. The Prophets and the imams are the mediators between God and Mankind. This is the reason why they should be wholly infallible to set the appropriate examples to be followed by Man.

1. Ghazālī, Faḍā'ih al-bāṭiniyya, 145.

2. Shabbir, Ḥaqq, 1:184.

It is clear that the Shī'ites advocated the doctrine of the infallibility of the prophets not for its own sake. In teaching the infallibility of the prophets, the Shī'ites were in fact preparing the way for claiming the same thing for their supernatural imams. The 'isma, as taught by the Shī'ites, can be taken in two senses:- (a) protection against sin i.e. both the prophets and imams are sinless and (b) protection against ignorance and imperfection of memory.

Prophets and Sins:

The question whether or not the Prophets were liable to sin led to a wide range of difference of opinion among Muslims. Ṭabarī, with some other jurists, theologians and traditionists, took the view that Prophets were liable to small sins. (1) Grave sins were, however, impossible in their case. The view developed by Ṭabarī and his colleagues was also held by the Mu'tazilites. (2) Some of the Sunnites taught that the Prophets were entirely sinless. Since we are instructed by God to imitate them and follow their steps, it is inconceivable that they could commit sins whether light or grave. (3)

Although some of the Sunnites held the doctrine of the infallibility of the Prophets, I believe it might be fairly demonstrated that the Shī'ites were the original advocates and

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1. Qurṭubī, Aḥkām, 1:308.
 2. Rāzī, Mafāṭīḥ, 1:482.
 3. Qurṭubī, Aḥkām, 1:308 ff.

legitimate parents of the doctrine. The concept of the Prophets infallibility helped them enormously to justify their extravagant claims regarding the imams. (1) They possess a much deeper interest in this particular dogma than the Sunnites. Not a single Shī'ite, as far as I know, taught that the Prophets were liable to sin.

As we have seen in the chapter of the imamate, Muslims whether Sunnites or otherwise, resort to the Qur'ān to justify the propositions which they hold as true. The verses of the Qur'ān clearly teach that the prophets might sin. It was not impossible for them to sin. Ṭabarī was prepared to take the Qur'ān in its most obvious sense. He did not feel the need to interpret the verses of the Qur'ān in such a way that the Prophets were represented as being totally free from sin and misconduct. For him the word of the Qur'ān was final; he accepted it whatever the case might be. We can take the following examples from the Qur'ān which are relevant to our topic of discussion to illustrate Ṭabarī's position:-

(I) "And (mention) Dhū n-nūn (i.e. Jonah) when he went off in anger and deemed that We had no power over him, lan naqdira 'alayhi but he cried out in the darkness saying: There is no God save Thee.

1. See Majlisī, Bihār, 10:393 where he puts forward the Shī'ites belief in Prophets' and imams' 'iṣma as explained by Muḥammad ibn-Bāhawayhi.

Be thou glorified! Lo! I have been a wrong doer" (Q.XXI:87).

There are two points here which commentators attempt to verify; both of them serve as a source of controversy among them, (a) whom did Jonah forsake? God or the people to whom he was sent, and (b) what is the meaning of the phrase fāzanna an lan naqdira 'alayhi?

The Shī'ites and those who endeavoured to save the name of the Prophet interpreted the verse to mean that he angrily left his people and not God. (1) They found it too much to hold a view that a prophet, any prophet, might rebel against his creator. By so doing the Shī'ites hoped to lighten the amount of burden and blame laid on the shoulders of the Prophet. Ṭabarī, who thought it necessary to take the verse in its straightforward meaning, maintained that the Prophet forsook his God in resentment. (2) He argued that even if we accepted that he furiously abandoned his people, this would also be a deadly mistake. God had already instructed him to stay amongst them in order to convey His message and the instructions of God must be carried out under all circumstances.

Ṭabarī was absolutely convinced that Jonah committed a sin and repented from it by uttering the words "Be Thou glorified Lo!

1. Majlisi, Biḥār, 14:388.

2. Ṭ.T, 17:55-58.

I have been a wrong doer" (Q.XXI:87). Majlisī, the famous Shī'ite author of the vast work entitled Bihar al-anwār, took a different attitude from Ṭabarī. For him the statement "I have been a wrong doer" was but a sign of humility to God. The fact that he made that statement does not necessarily imply that he acted wrongly. (1) Ṭabarī would not accept this kind of argument. The Qur'ān describes how a severe punishment was inflicted upon Jonah as a result of his deed. Had he not committed a sin, Ṭabarī argues, he would not have been punished in that way.

Ṭabarī goes on to seek other evidences from the Qur'ān to give strength to his view that Jonah made a grave mistake. God instructed his prophet Muḥammad not to follow the example of Jonah "But wait thou for thy Lord's decree, and be not like him of the fish (i.e. Jonah)" (Q.LXVIII:48). This in itself, Ṭabarī held, was substantial evidence that Jonah had done something grave and unlawful. (2)

(b) The phrase f-ẓanna an lan naqdira 'alayhī is interpreted by some Muslim theologians to mean that Jonah thought that God did not have power over him. Ṭabarī was not prepared to go as far as that extreme. For him this view would ultimately give rise to dangerous consequences. It inevitably involved that Jonah, who was chosen for the office of prophecy, was absolutely

1. Bihār, 14:388.

2. T.T, 17:56.

ignorant about God's attributes. This in its turn would open the way to infidelity and disbelief. Ṭabarī would not have been happy to see a man appointed by God as a prophet turning out to be an infidel.⁽¹⁾ The verse should, therefore, be interpreted to mean that Jonah thought that God would not inflict limitations and hard measures on him, i.e. he seemed to miscalculate the implications of his deed, that is, of forsaking his people.⁽²⁾

(II) "Then have patience (O Muḥammad) Lo! the promise of God is true and ask forgiveness for thy sin" (Q.XL:55) - "So know (O Muḥammad) that there is no God save Allah, and ask forgiveness for thy sin and for believing men and believing women" (Q.XLVII: 19). These verses of the Qur'ān clearly show that Prophet Muḥammad was liable to sin. Ṭabarī warmly welcomed any Qur'ānic conception without hesitancy. Here, the Qur'ān advises Prophet Muḥammad to ask God's forgiveness. This necessarily implies that he had done something incorrect to be forgiven for.⁽³⁾ Ṭabarī maintained that it was absolutely absurd to say, for instance, O God! forgive me for the sin I committed not!⁽⁴⁾

1. Ṭ.T, 17:57.

2. Majlisī accepts this interpretation, Bihār, 14:389.

3. Zamakhsharī, of the Mu'tazilite sect who permitted prophets' sin, followed the same line of argument when he dealt with "God forgive thee (O Muḥammad)! Why didst thou grant them permission to leave before you could distinguish between those who told the truth and those who told lies" (Q.IX:43), Kashshāf, 1:396.

4. Ṭ.T, 26:39.

Those who sought to absolve the Prophet from the slightest sign of sin fell into many absurdities and ridiculous assertions. The Prophet, they held, was asking God's forgiveness not for his own person. The appeal for God's forgiveness was presented by the Prophet either for the individual members of his Muslim community or for his parents Adam and Eve! (1) They added that the Prophet's sins, if any, had already been abolished by God when he declares "We have given thee (O Muhammad) a signal victory that God may forgive thee of thy sin that which is past and that which is to come" (Q. XLVIII: 1-2).

Ṭabarī's answer to the last argument was ready. The verses quoted by those who advocated the infallibility of the Prophet state no more than a promise that the Prophet's sin would be dissolved and pardoned if he was found thankful for God's graces to him, e.g. winning over his enemies. (2) The reports that the Prophet used to ask God's forgiveness a hundred times in a single assembly, (3) even after the revealing of those verses, are evident indications for Ṭabarī that the Prophet was exposed to sin at any period of his life. No evidence can be drawn from the Qur'ān that he was protected against it.

1. Nīsābūrī, Raghā'ib, 26:48; Majlisī, Bihār, 17:74.

2. T.T, 26:39.

3. Ibid., 15:90.

In the chapter of al-fath, which was sent down in the tenth year of the hijra, i.e. the year in which the Prophet died, the Prophet was again instructed to ask God's forgiveness "then hymn the praise of thy Lord, and seek forgiveness of Him. Lo! He is ever ready to show mercy" (Q.CX:3). This verse gave Ṭabarī an opportunity to repeat his arguments that sin was conceivable in the case of the Prophet at any moment; no protection against sin ever existed. (1)

The Prophet and forgetfulness:

The Shī'ites not only objected to the statement that the Prophet could possibly sin but also to the statement that he could forget something, particularly of that which had been revealed to him throughout the period of his prophecy. (2) The Imāmites, with the exception of two or three scholars such as Muḥammad ibn-Bābawayhī and his teacher Muḥammad ibn-al-Ḥasan ibn-al-Walīd, swept away all the reports which conveyed that the memory of the Prophet and their imams such as 'Alī and al-Bāqir betrayed them on certain occasions. (3)

Ṭabarī argued at length that the Prophet could, and in fact did, forget some of what had once been revealed to him. (4)

1. Ṭ.T, 15:90.

2. See, for example, Shabbir, Ḥaqq, 1:127; Kāzīmī, Khaṣā'is, 14.

3. Shabbir, Ḥaqq, 1:124.

4. See, Ṭ.T, 1:361.

He, however, attempted to lessen the sharpness and severity of that daring view by stating that the verses which the Prophet forgot were those which had no immediate impact on human life. Putting his views in a clear and straightforward manner, Ṭabarī went on to give examples of some of the verses of the Qur'ān which were said to be forgotten and done away with.

The verse "And if We willed We could withdraw that which We have revealed unto thee" (Q. XVII: 86) is taken by some interpreters to affirm and justify that the Prophet was not liable to memory failure. Ṭabarī commented, and rightly, that the verse does not bear such connotation. It only states that God possesses the unlimited and unquestioned power to take away the Qur'ān altogether from the heart of the Prophet. (1) Out of mercy, however, He left the affirmed Qur'ānic verses as they were. Ṭabarī claimed that God makes it remarkably clear that He caused the Prophet to forget what He intended to thrust out or abrogate. This was an extremely bold view and Ṭabarī had his evidences for it. It had its roots and foundations in the Qur'ān itself. In Ṭabarī's eyes the following verses justify his view:-

(I) "And remember thy Lord when thou forgettest, and say: it may be that my Lord guideth me into a nearer way of truth than this" (Q. XVIII:24).

1. See, T.T, 1:361.

(II) "We shall make thee recite (O Muḥammad) so that thou shalt not forget, save that which God willeth" (Q.LXXXVII: 6-7).

Verse (I) supports the general theme that the Prophet could possibly forget; his memory was not wholly perfect. Verse (II) supports the view that the Prophet might forget some of the verses revealed at a certain point of time. It is interesting to notice that some of the Shī'ites introduced Verse (II) incomplete omitting the words "save that ...".⁽¹⁾ The intention behind this deliberate omission is obvious. If the verse is recited incomplete Ṭabarī's argument will crumble.

Ṭabarī rejected the view of those who held verse (II) to mean that God would not will his Prophet to forget some of the verses of the Qur'ān. They claimed that the verse is similar in meaning to that in the chapter of Ḥūd "And those who will be endowed with happiness, will remain in the Garden so long as the heavens and the earth endure save for that which thy Lord willeth" (Q.XI:108). They concluded that since God promised to place the faithful in Paradise for ever, we are assured that He will never will to have them out of it. For them the same thing applies to the words "so that thou shall not forget save that which God willeth".⁽²⁾ The most obvious sense of the verse, Ṭabarī maintained, was that the Prophet would not forget the verses of the Qur'ān, except those which God determined

1. Khāliṣī , Iḥyā', 59.

2. Ṭ.T, 30:84f.

to cause him to forget and Ṭabarī has not the least heaviness in his heart to accept it.

(III) "For whatever verse We cancel or cause to forget, We bring a better or the like" (Q.II:106). To strengthen his position, namely that the Prophet was liable to forget, Ṭabarī introduced two ancient readings:- In the first place we find the verse read in the Codex of 'Abd-Allāh ibn-Mas'ūd as follows: mā nunsika min āyatⁱⁿ⁽¹⁾ i.e. whatever verse We cause you to forget. Secondly Sa'd ibn-Abī-Waqqāṣ is reported to have read it - mā nansakh min āyatⁱⁿ aw tansāhā⁽²⁾ i.e. whatever verse we abrogate or you forget. This last reading of Sa'ad-ibn-Abī-Waqqāṣ essentially conveys the same meaning as that of Ibn-Mas'ūd.

As-Suddī, representing the Shī'ites view, took the verb nasiya - originally "forgot" - to mean taraka or "left-untouched". According to this interpretation the meaning of the verse would be: Whatever verse We abrogate or leave unabrogated, i.e. affirmed, We bring the better or the like.⁽³⁾ Ṭabarī held that all three mentioned verses, (I), (II) and (III), were unveiled implications that the Prophet was not endowed with the alleged infallible memory.

Following his view to its logical conclusion, Ṭabarī was

1. Ṭ.T, 1:359; see, also, A. Jeffery, Materials, 27.

2. For the other readings of the verse see Goldziher, Richtungen, 24.

3. Ṭ.T, 1:360.

absolutely prepared to accept the story of the gharānīq or the exalted females. The story goes that one day the Prophet was practising his dawn prayer in the Ka'ba where there were a number of the heads of the unbelievers. He began to recite the Chapter of an-Najm or the Star. When he reached the verses: "Have ye thought upon Al-Lāt and al-'Uzzā and Manāt the third idol besides" (Q.LIII: 19-20), the Satan is said to have put into his mouth the words: "These are the exalted females and verily their intercession is to be hoped for." (1)

Ṭabarī introduced the story of al-gharānīq to elucidate the meaning of the verses: "We have not sent an apostle or a prophet before thee but when he recited, tamannā, Satan proposed in umniyatihī. God abolisheth that which Satan proposeth and then He establisheth His revelations. That He may make that which the devil proposeth a temptation for those in whose hearts is a disease i.e. doubt and those whose hearts are hardened". (Q.XXII: 52-53). The term tamannā is one of the difficult terms in the Qur'ān which were subject to many controversial interpretations. Ṭabarī, seeing the term used in connection with abrogation and affirmation, thought it convenient to give it the meaning of "reading". Ibn-Ḥazm, sweeping the whole thing aside as mere fabrication of story tellers, inter-

1. T.T, 17:119-121.

preted the word to mean "wishes" e.g. the Prophet wished the belief of his uncle Abū-Ṭālib. (1)

The question of the gharānīq led to a hot controversy among Muslims. Not a single Shī'ite seems to accept the story. Majlisī described it as riwāyat al-'amma (2) i.e. the report of the common, presumably the Sunnites. The story, he claimed, was not of the type of al-mutawātir or unquestioned narrations to which we have to submit without further investigation or hesitation. (3) Some of the Shī'ites are too violent and sharp in rejecting the story of al-gharānīq. 'Abd-Allāh Shabbir charged anyone who accepted it with disbelief. (4)

For Ṭabarī the story was especially designed by God as a test or fitna for those who live in doubts about the truthfulness of the Prophet. This test which is mentioned in the verse concerned, would obviously have no place if we are reluctant to accept the story as true. Ṭabarī also argued that had it not been for God's mercy on the Prophet, he would have made the compromise asked for by the unbelievers of Mecca. (5) The Qur'ān, he added, states this most clearly: "And if we had not made thee

1. Ibn-Ḥazm, Fīṣal, 4:23.

2. Bihār, 17:85.

3. Ibid., 17:59.

4. Ḥaqq, 1:121.

5. Ṭ.T, 15:83.

wholly firm thou mightest almost have inclined unto them a little." (Q.XVII:73).⁽¹⁾ 76/74

From what has been said one would hope that it is clear that Ṭabarī had no faith in either of the two aspects of the infallibility of the Prophets - protection against sin and memory failure or defect - mainly propagated by the Shī'ites. Now we will proceed to examine the position of Ṭabarī as far as the infallibility of ahl-al-bayt i.e. the Household of the Prophet is concerned.

The term ahl-al-bayt is introduced once in the Qur'ān, "God's wish is to remove uncleanness or rijs far from you O Folk of the Household, and cleanse you with a thorough cleansing" (Q.XXXII:33). The members of the Household of the Prophet came to acquire a special place of significance especially in the eyes of the Shī'ites. Elimination of the element of ahl-al-bayt ultimately amounts to the closing down of the door of knowledge. All observant Muslims, for example, perform the duty of the prayer; but the only one who performs it in its true and authentic sense is the Shī'ite. This is because, the Shī'ites explain, he comes to know its particulars through the channel of the infallible members of the family of the Prophet. These, we are told, are the keepers of the Sharī'a and law.⁽²⁾

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1. Muir, also, considers the verse to refer to the gharānīq story described, Sell, Historical development of the Qur'ān, 26.
 2. Kāzīmī, Khaṣā'is, 55.

To define who belongs to the household of the Prophet and who are those meant by the Qur'ānic verse is, therefore, a matter of crucial importance. Ṭabarī presented in his Tafsīr⁽¹⁾ two views as regards ahl-al-bayt: (a) These are:- 'Alī, Ḥasan, Ḥusayn and Fāṭima the daughter of the Prophet. The Prophet, we are informed, covered 'Alī, his two sons Ḥasan and Ḥusayn and their mother Fāṭima with his own garment and pointed out that God's words referred to them in particular. Umm-Salama, the wife of the Prophet, appealed to him to consider her as a member of that honoured group. The Prophet denied her admittance and added that she was but one of his good wives.⁽²⁾ (b) the term ahl-al-bayt referred to the wives of the Prophet in particular. Ṭabarī tried to avoid giving his own personal view on this sensitive and disputable issue. Nevertheless he seemed to favour (a) to which he devoted two pages of his work; for (b) he spared but two lines.

The Shī'ites, who found much pleasure in Ṭabarī's narration of al-ghadīr which we have discussed in the chapter of the imamate, are also pleased with Ṭabarī's narration of the tradition of ahl-al-kisā' i.e. those covered by the garment of

1. 22: 5-7.

2. See, also, Ibn-Furāt, Tafsīr, 124 ff.

the Prophet.⁽¹⁾ Both of these traditions play a central part in the writings of the Shī'ites. We have to remember constantly that Ṭabarī had no prejudices, whatsoever, against ahl-al-bayt, but we have to remember equally that he afforded no partiality towards them. He was entirely prepared to allow them what he thought to be their legal rights but at the same time he objected violently to extravagant claims advocated by enthusiastic Shī'ites.

The Shī'ites attempted to seek representation of ahl-al-bayt either by inserting them in verses which had nothing to do with them or by twisting the obvious meaning of texts to serve their own purposes. To the Qur'ānic verse "God preferred Adam, Noah, the Family of Abraham and the Family of 'Imrān above all his creatures" (Q. III:33), they added "and the Family of Muḥammad!"⁽²⁾ Also the Qur'ān says: "peace be unto Ilyāsīn i.e. Elias" (Q. XXXVII:130). Ilyāsīn, here is read by them as Āl Yāsīn i.e. Āl Muḥammad or the Family of Muḥammad.⁽³⁾

Ṭabarī rejected the peculiar reading of Āl Yāsīn on the grounds that peace is said to be unto the persons of the Prophets mentioned in the Sūra and not unto their Families. Muḥammad

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1. Shabbir, Ḥaqq, 1:278.
 2. Ibn-Furāt, Tafsīr, 18.
 3. Ṭ.T, 23:55f.

was certainly not an exception. Ilyāsīn stands, according to Ṭabarī's view, for Ilyās (Elias) being treated in the same way as Idrāsīn i.e. Idrīs. 'Abd-Allāh-ibn-Salām, the well-known converted Jew and Companion of the Prophet, is reported to have read it "peace be unto Idrāsīn" claiming that Idrīs equals Elias. Ṭabarī took this reading attributed to 'Abd-Allāh-ibn-Salām as strong evidence against the Shī'ite reading Āl Yāsīn which he strongly rejected.

Now let us enter into some details about Ṭabarī's standpoints as far as ahl-al-bayt and dhawī-l-qurbā i.e. near kinsmen are concerned. Here are some of the examples of verses which deal with the issue examined by Ṭabarī:

(I) "And know that whatever ye take as spoils of war, a fifth thereof is for God, and for the messenger and dhawī-l-qurbā and orphans and the needy and the wayfarer" (Q.VIII:41). The first question to be asked is what is meant by the term dhawī-l-qurbā in this connection? Three answers are given to this question in Ṭabarī's Tafsīr:⁽¹⁾

- (a) These are the various members of the tribe of Quraysh.
- (b) The term stands for the one who succeeds the Prophet in the leadership of the community, that is, the imām.
- (c) Not all the members of the tribe of Quraysh are included in this term.

1. 10:4ff.

The term should be limited to the clan of Hāshim and Banū-'Abd-al-Muṭṭalib. The fifth is not legitimized to anyone outside that clan.

Ṭabarī was prepared to accept this last interpretation (c). Here we find him in agreement with the Shī'ites who, of course, welcomed and favoured the view that the term dhawī -l-qurbā must be confined to Hāshim and Banū-'Abd-al-Muṭṭalib. To the disappointment of the Shī'ites, however, Ṭabarī argued that the share of Banū-'Abd-al-Muṭṭalib and Hāshim should be cancelled immediately after the death of the Prophet. This was because the Prophet himself is reported to have said: "We Prophets have no heirs; what we leave behind us should be distributed as a charity - mā taraknāh^u sadaqa."⁽¹⁾

The Shī'ites, as one can anticipate, disapproved of the opinion expressed by Ṭabarī that the share of Banū-'Abd-al-Muṭṭalib and Hāshim was to be crossed out after the Prophet's death. They questioned the authenticity of the Prophetic tradition upon which Ṭabarī depended.⁽²⁾ They rebuked 'Umar ibn-al-Khaṭṭāb, their traditional enemy, because he prevented, relying on the same tradition, ahl-al-bayt from receiving their lawful share.⁽³⁾

1. Ṭ.T, 28: 24f.

2. See, for instance, Shabbir, Ḥaqq, 1:141ff.

3. Ibid., 1:255.

The Shī'ites, represented by 'Alī ibn-al-Ḥusayn known as Zayn al-Ābidīn and 'Abd-Allāh ibn-Muḥammad ibn-'Alī, claimed that the orphans and the needy, referred to in the verse, are those of the Family of the Prophet.⁽¹⁾ Ṭabarī could not accept this arbitrary restriction. He maintained that these were the orphans and the needy of the Muslim community at large.

(II) "Give the kinsman his due, and the needy and the wayfarer" (Q.XVII:24). In this verse Ṭabarī was even reluctant to confine dhā-l-qurba to the relatives of the Prophet.⁽²⁾ For him the term should be taken in its broadest sense to cover every individual relative from either father or mother. He again quoted the Shī'ites view but refuted it vigorously.

(III) Say (O Muḥammad): I ask you no fee save watching loving kindness for kinship, illa -l-mawaddata fī -l-qurbā" (Q.XLII:23). Ṭabarī, rejecting the view of the Shī'ites represented by 'Alī ibn-al-Ḥusayn who limited the verse to the Family of the Prophet, commented that the qurbā in that connection was the relationship of the Prophet to the tribe of Quraysh.⁽³⁾ Ṭabarī, arguing from a linguistic point of view, held that had it been otherwise, the preposition fī would

1. Ṭ.T, 10:6.

2. Ibid., 15:50.

3. Ṭ.T, 25:13-15. Bukhārī related that Sa'īd ibn-Jubayr, who referred the verse to the Family of the Prophet in particular, was set right by Ibn-'Abbās who took the same view as that of Ṭabarī, Ṣaḥīḥ, 3:326.

have no place. The interpretation given to the verse by the Shī'ites differs uncompromisingly from that given by Ṭabarī. For them the message of Muḥammad has only one cost. This cost is undoubtedly the association of the believers in his message with the members of his family. (1)

Tremendous importance is, therefore, attached to the question of belonging to the House of the Prophet. It is vital not only as a financial and social element but also as a political and, more important, theological one. The infallibility of the imams, who must belong to ahl-al-bayt in the Shī'ite theory, is a continuation of the infallibility of the Prophet himself. Each imām passes over the post of the imamate to his successor together with the light of the Prophet or an-nūr al-Muḥammadi (2) and the quality of the infallibility.

Majlisī tells us that three conditions are to be satisfied by an imām before he can be recognized as a legitimate imām:- (a) he should be absolutely infallible, (b) he must be appointed by his forerunner, and (c) he should be able to perform miraculous deeds impossible for ordinary men. (3) Being infallible he will not be subject to challenge from any member of the community. Thus it is related that a Shī'ite named

1. Majlisī, Biḥār, 10:393f.

2. E. Sell, The faith of Islām, 97.

3. Biḥār, 10:451. It is not our intention to discuss (b) and (c) here as they are out of the scope of this work.

Zurāra asked one of the imams to state his evidence for his view from the Qur'ān; later Shī'ites felt it necessary to find out an explanation for the behaviour of Zurāra. Since no objection to the imām's view is thinkable Zurāra's aim must have been to learn the evidence from his master. His aim cannot have been to embarrass the imām or reduce him to perplexity by demanding such evidence. (1)

Ṭabarī, and the Sunnites (2) in general, had no faith in the doctrine of the infallibility of the imams. In his Tafsīr, he rejected the views of some of the most prominent imams such as 'Alī ibn-Abī-Ṭālib. The latter held that the verse "And for those with child, their period shall be till they bring forth their burden" (Q.LXV:4) should be confined to the case of the divorced women. Ṭabarī challenged this view claiming that the verse should be extended to cover widows as well as divorced women. (3)

The Shī'ites, as anticipated, made an attempt to find support for their doctrine of infallibility in the Qur'ān. The following verse is said to be a foundation for it: (4) "And (remember) when his Lord tried Abraham with commands, and he fulfilled them, He said; I have appointed thee a leader, imām,

1. Shabbir, Ḥaqq, 2:328.

2. See, for example, Ibn-Taymiyya, Raf' al-malām, 40.

3. Ṭ.T, 28:84f.

4. Khāliṣī, Iḥyā', 59; E. Sell, The faith of Islam, 95.

for mankind. And Abraham said: And of my offspring also? He said: My covenant includeth not wrongdoers, Zālimīn" (Q. II:124). ^{118/} Ṭabarī agreed with the Shī'ites that a zālim cannot be appointed as an imām. He, however, gave the term a special meaning. For him the zālim equals the unbeliever. The verse, therefore, only indicates that an unbeliever is disqualified as a candidate for the post of the imamate. (1) Ṭabarī seemed to fail to see any sort of relation between this verse and the Shī'ite doctrine of infallibility.

The faith of the Shī'ites in the infallibility of their imams is as strong as their faith in that of the Prophet himself. They equally deny, for example, memory failure to the imams. 'Alī ibn-Abī-Ṭālib, for instance, is said to have possessed a mysterious gigantic memory. He never heard a saying from the Prophet that passed away from his memory. (2) 'Alī is alleged to be supplied with that power of memorization on the appeal of the Prophet to endow him with that advantage. Commenting on the verse "That We make it a memorial for you, and that remembering ears (that heard the story) might remember" (Q. LXIX:12), Ṭabarī passed over these traditions assigned to the Prophet without the least comment from his side. (3)

1. Ṭ.T, 1:398.

2. Majlisī, Bihār, 35:326ff.

3. Ṭ.T, 29:30.

Having the privilege of being the immediate successor of the Prophet, as the Shī'ites teach, 'Alī almost enjoyed equal respect. The knowledge he possessed is unparalleled. Ṭabarī was accused of teaching a tradition to the effect that on the death of the Prophet, his soul crystallised into the hands of 'Alī who swallowed it.⁽¹⁾ When he reported to Naṣr al-Ḥājib, he was said to have had objection to the wording of the tradition. This might be, at any rate, a symbolization of the knowledge inherited from the Prophet by 'Alī and after him by various members of his Family. The knowledge possessed by ahl-al-bayt is held to be more miraculous than the splitting of the moon and the other miracles ascribed to the Prophet.⁽²⁾

The phrase ahl-al-bayt al-ma'sūmūn is one of the most popular expressions in Shī'ite writings and literature. Both the Sunnites and the Shī'ites took the Prophetic traditions and sayings to be the second source of law and knowledge, only second to the Qur'ān. The only difference is that the Shī'ites accept, as we have seen before, only those traditions whose chain of authority goes back to the infallible family of the Prophet.⁽³⁾ Needless to say, Ṭabarī accepted traditions related even by ordinary women such as Fāṭima bint-Qays.⁽⁴⁾ Mu'āwiya

1. Ibn-al-Jawzī, Muntazam, 6:172. I am afraid that this might be another false accusation of our scholar.

2. Kāshif al-ghīṭā', al-Firdaws al-a'la, 18.

3. See, for instance, Maḥmaṣṣanī, Falsafat at-tashrī', 36.

4. Ṭ.T., 28:86.

ibn-Abī-Sufyān, who took the most antagonistic attitude towards aḥl-al-bayt, is the only authority in Ṭabarī's Tafsīr⁽¹⁾ to assert that the verse (Q.XVIII:110) is the last verse ever revealed.

The notion of infallibility penetrates deep into the Shī'ite system of thought. It colours their individual views about principles which acquire a place of significance in Muslim intellectual history. We will discuss two of these principles, namely consensus and analogy,⁽²⁾ to see (a) how far they are coloured with the doctrine of the infallibility and (b) how far Ṭabarī diverges from the line pursued by the Shī'ites.

The Principle of Consensus:

This is one of the most important principles which enjoy wide concern among Muslims.⁽³⁾ The Shī'ites adhere to the principle of consensus as far as the existence and the authority of the infallible imams is recognized and appealed to. It is a source of knowledge and truth only because it eventually includes the saying of the infallible imām. Al-ittifāq al-mushtamil 'alā qawl al-ma'ṣūm is the usual way of expressing this fundamental

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1. 16:28.
 2. These principles and the like are usually confined to the study of law. Ibn-Ḥazm, however, thought it necessary to extend the application of the principles in which he believed from the study of law to that of dogmatic theology, E.B., 12:33.
 3. Ash-Shāfi'ī, for example, read the Qur'ān 300 times to find an evidence that consensus or ijmā' is a proof or hujja, Nisābūrī, Raghā'ib, 5:175.

idea. (1) Therefore, we should anticipate that the only evidence of value on matters of religion, with regard to consensus, is their own agreement. This is obviously because they are the only substantial group that hold the 'iṣma doctrine and every generation must have its ḥujja i.e. an infallible imām whether hidden or apparent.

The mere agreement of Muslim scholars on particular aspects of the sharī'a has little or no value at all in the Shī'ites' consideration. In fact they throw every shadow of doubt on the ijmā' principle if it is only taken to mean the general agreement of people. The multitude has no significance as far as truth is concerned. The great masses of people enjoy no good reputation in the Qur'ān: (2) "And if thou obeyedst most of those on earth they would mislead thee far from God's way (Q.VI:117). Ṭabarī argued that this was so because the vast majority of people were disbelievers at the time the verse was revealed. (3) The outshot of his argument was to state that the situation alters when the masses come to accept Islam as their sole religion.

Ṭabarī showed himself completely faithful to the principle

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1. Mashkūr, Comm. on Qummī maq., 145; A'yān ash-shī'a, 2nd division 308f; Majlisī, Bihār, 10:443; Rāzī, Arba'in, 441; Maḥmaṣṣanī, Falsafat at-tashrī', 36; Shabbir, Ḥaqq, 2:46.
 2. Shabbir, Ḥaqq, 1:286.
 3. T.T, 8:8.

of consensus which was a topic of controversy among Muslims.⁽¹⁾ He never doubted the principle which he considered to be one of the sources of religious knowledge. Commenting on the verse "And whosoever cannot find (such gifts), then a fast of three days while on the pilgrimage, and of seven when ye have returned is required" (Q.II:196), he pointed out that that means when you return to your native countries and not when you return from Minā to Mecca. He added: "if I am asked what is my evidence that the meaning of the verse is what I have put forward, my answer will be the unanimous agreement of ahl-al-‘ilm i.e. Muslim savants."⁽²⁾

In various places in his Tafsīr⁽³⁾ Ṭabarī expressed the view that it is not permissible to question the authority of the Muslim scholars when they come to agree on a certain issue. Any individual view which is incompatible with the general agreement of ahl-at-ta’wīl, those who satisfy the necessary requirements for the interpretation of the Qur’ān, should be declared as erroneous.⁽⁴⁾ He clearly distinguished between two things:

1. Some of the Mu‘tazilites, such as an-Nazzām, claimed that the whole Muslim community could agree on what is false, Shahrastānī, Milal, 1:72; Baghdādī, Uṣūl, 11f; Muḥsin, Ibn-Khaldūn philosophy of history, 137. The Zāhirites limited the ijmā‘ to that of the Companions of the Prophet, Baghdādī, Uṣūl, 20.
2. See, for example, 30:89.
3. Ibid., 2:20.

(a) hujja i.e. authority having the right to give a verdict on disputable issues, and (b) ra'y or personal opinion. The learned agreement is binding, unlike the individual stands which belong to (b), and, therefore, can by no means be challenged by (a).⁽¹⁾ Ṭabarī thus showed every sign of deferential esteem for popular views held by the great majority of Muslims.

This unconditional faith in the principle of ijmā' brought Ṭabarī and us great disadvantages. Indeed it helped in preserving the faith of the masses for the longest possible period but it denied us the fruits of personal independent judgements. Ṭabarī, for example, claimed that the best place to execute God's commands is Mecca or the haram of Abraham i.e. he seemed to suggest that any offence should receive its penalty no matter where it had been conducted or where the criminal took refuge. The great majority of Muslims, however, are reluctant to punish a criminal who enters the Ka'ba so long as he is there. Ṭabarī had to give up his profound view simply because the salaf did not sympathize with it.⁽²⁾

On one occasion, Ṭabarī admitted that al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī's view was more likely than the others. Nonetheless he was unwilling to accept it. This was because the other views were held by a greater number of scholars whose knowledge of the Book was more profound and adequate than that of al-Ḥasan's.⁽³⁾ To me

1. See Ṭ.T, 3:178; 1:307; 2:17.

2. Ibid., 4:18.

3. Ibid., 3:225.

the fact that the number was greater has nothing to do with the question of the validity of a statement. If, for argument sake, we accept that their knowledge of the Book was more intensive, this does not mean or show that their commentaries on each individual verse must be ultimately more reliable.

To be fair to Ṭabarī, however, one should mention that he did not always cling to the views of the majority of Muslim scholars. An outstanding example of his departure from them is this: all the authorities he quoted, including eminent scholars such as al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, held that the term sufahā' introduced in (Q.IV:5) should be restricted to women and children. Ṭabarī, accusing them of corrupting language, maintained with vehemence that the term was to be taken in its general and absolute sense. It applied to anyone who happens to be unwise regardless of his sex or age. (1)

The Principle of Analogy:

This, again, is a controversial issue. A sizeable group of people questioned this principle. Among these are: The Sumaniyya, (2) some of the Mu'tazilites such as Ja'far ibn-Mubbashir, (3)

1. Ṭ.T, 4:153.

2. Baghdādī, Farq, 270; W.M. Watt, Logical basis of early kalām, I.Q., 6:10.

3. Khayyāṭ, Intiṣār, 68.

the Zāhirites, (1) and some of the Shī'ites. (2) The only group that matters here is, of course, the last one as the other ones lie beyond the scope of this thesis. The Shī'ites divided into two groups as far as qiyās and ra'y are concerned. Some of them forbade it completely while others allowed it. The Imāmiyya themselves split into two groups: (3) (a) the Akhbāriyyūn or the narrators and (b) the Uṣūliyyūn or those who concerned themselves with the roots of religion and law.

Those belonging to the group of the Akhbāriyyūn rejected analogy altogether. Muḥammad ibn-al-Ḥasan ibn-'Alī-aṭ-Ṭūsī tells us in his Fihrist (4) that many felt that the books of a famous Shī'ite author named Muḥammad ibn-al-Junayd should be abandoned. The reason for the abandonment of these books, he said, was the fact that their author held the view that the principle of analogy should be permitted in the study of law. The Uṣūliyyūn, however, accepted it as an instrument for knowledge.

The Akhbāriyyūn seem to be more consistent and faithful to the doctrine of the infallibility of the imams than the Uṣūliyyūn. As a matter of fact both of them agree that the

1. Ibn-an-Nadīm, Fihrist, 305; Ibn-al-Athīr, Ansāb, 2:99f; Ibn-Khaldūn, Muqaddima, 372; Shahrastānī, Milal, 2:45; Macdonald, Development, 108f.

2. Mabānī's Muqaddima, 185; Mashkūr, Comm. on Qummī maq., 144.

3. Maḥmaṣṣānī, Falsafal-at-tashrī', 36f.

4. 4:268.

imams are, by definition, infallible. The logical consequence of this doctrine is to abandon reason and follow the instructions of the imams whose knowledge is complete and perfect. The fact that the doctrine of the infallibility should naturally lead to intellectual decay ^{تدهور عقول} seems to be self-evident. Some Muslim scholars noticed long ago the close relationship that exists between the doctrine of the infallibility and blind following or imitation. (1)

Ṭabarī waged an open war on the idea of imitation or taqlīd. For him ignorance was no excuse. Every rational being has to speculate for himself and use his faculty of reasoning. Those who held that God would not punish wrongdoers who were ignorant of the fact that they were doing wrong, were bitterly criticized by him. The verse "They chose the devils for protecting friends instead of God and deem that they are rightly guided" (Q. VII:30), is a clear indication that ignorance will not absolve from responsibility. (2) Only three classes of people are recognized by Ṭabarī as being justifiable in protesting against punishment: (a) children who are not mature enough to bear responsibilities, (b) those suffering from mental illness which deprives them from rational thinking, and (c) those who had not the experience of a revealed message. (3)

1. See, for example, Ghazālī, Faḍā'ih al-Bāṭiniyya, 129.

2. Ṭ.T, 8:108.

3. Ibid., 16:154.

The Mu'tazilites claimed that only those who are capable of knowing God through rational investigation are entitled to the description of being believers. (1) Ṭabarī was absolutely prepared to accept the view expressed by the Mu'tazilites. (2) Ibn-Ḥazm related that Ṭabarī maintained that by the age of seven every human being, whether male or female, should be taught how to use his mental powers to prove the existence of God and learn his different attributes. Even ^{عسيف/عسيف} *fiera = ndj* Ibn-Ḥazm, who attacked the notion of taqlīd fiercely, would not accept this. He argued that those under the age of maturity are not expected to bear such a task. (3) For Ṭabarī, therefore, the only way to true faith was rational argumentation or al-istidlāl al-'aqlī. Blind following of the imams would not do.

Ṭabarī strongly believed that anything of human use could and should be arrived at by either of two ways, namely revelation and reasoning. A nass or a text either from the Qur'ān or the Sunna might be wanting on certain occasions but an inference or a hint, dalāla is always available. It just awaits the efforts of Muslim scholars to discover and utilize

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1. Goldziher, Vorlesungen, 117.
 2. Ibn-Ḥazm, Fīṣal, 3:35.
 3. Ibid., 4:35ff. Although Ibn-Ḥazm criticized Ṭabarī for his view, he paid him tokens of respect which he denied to al-Ash'arī and his followers who held similar views, Fīṣal, 4:41. He is ready to report traditions wholly based on Ṭabarī's authority, Fīṣal, 4:134.

it. (1) Whenever a nass is present we are bound to submit to it but where the Qur'ān and the Sunna furnished no rule, analogical reasoning should be applied to supply what was lacking. (2)

Ṭabarī appealed to analogy not only in the sphere of religion and law but also in linguistic discussions. He asserted, for example, that analogically speaking anhira can be taken as a plural form of nahār or daylight, although the Arabs treated the word as daw' or light and never bothered to give it a plural form. (3)

The knowledge that Ṭabarī sought was certainly ma'rifa yaqīniyya. (4) This is attainable either by reason, 'aql or by revelation and traditions, khabar. The khabar is either received from God or His prophet. If both of these two sources fail us, then it does us no harm to be ignorant about the question at hand. We have to forget all about it. The following example may serve as an illustration of Ṭabarī's attitude. Several views are quoted as regards the question "who built the Ka'ba?" Ṭabarī commented that we do not acquire concrete and comprehensive knowledge as far as the

1. T.T, 1:28ff.

2. Ibid., 5:194.

3. Ibid., 2:37; Another example will be found in 5:197.

4. Ibid., 30:14.

question is concerned. The only source of such ancient historical knowledge is God, i.e. the Qur'ān and His Prophet, i.e. the Sunna which is widely conveyed, an-naql al-mustafīd. Since no guidance is contained in these two sources and we cannot use analogical argument to draw conclusions, we cannot say which of the previous mentioned views is more intelligible. Analogical argumentation is not applicable as analogy meant for Ṭabarī reduction of disputable branches to their original sources which enjoy general consent. (1)

The four principles: Qur'ān, Sunna, Consensus and Analogy, formulated by ash-Shāfi'ī in his famous Risāla, (2) are accepted by Ṭabarī as ways of knowledge. He defended qiyās with the same vigour we have seen in dealing with the principle of ijmā'. Those who swept away the principle of analogy attempted to seek traditions deploring it ascribed to pious Muslims such as al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and Ibn-Sīrīn. Both these men are claimed to have said that the first to use analogy was Iblīs when He said: "I am better than Adam. Thou createdst me of fire, whilst him, Thou didst create of clay" (Q. XXXVIII:76). Ṭabarī pointed out that both scholars meant

1. Ṭ.T, 6:70.

2. For ash-Shāfi'ī's views on qiyās which resemble Ṭabarī's views in many respects see, Risāla, 65ff.

wrong analogy, - al-qiyās al-Khaṭā'⁽¹⁾; and not analogy as such.

Analogy paved the way for rational thinking and reflection. This in its turn led to differences of opinion among Muslims. It is because of that the Shī'ites created and developed their doctrine of the infallible imāms.⁽²⁾ The function of these infallible imāms is to guide people in the right direction. The Shī'ites felt it imperative to obey the imām and follow his example. Without him knowledge is simply impossible.⁽³⁾ The truth taught by the infallible imām is one and there can be no trifling^{ad} with it even in details.⁽⁴⁾ One could hardly see any justification for the Imāmiyya differences on religious matters since their source is one and the same, namely the infallible imām.

Needless to say, Ṭabarī allowed differences of opinion on the various branches of law. Indeed he compiled a book on the differences of Muslim jurists and gave it the name, "Ikhtilāf al-fuqahā'".⁽⁵⁾ Differences on religious matters are inconceivable for a sizeable group of the Shī'ites. The Bāṭiniyya, who resemble the Imāmiyya in several aspects of their

1. Ṭ.T, 8:89.

2. Shabbir, Ḥaqq, 1:130.

3. Kāzimī, Khaṣā'is, 27.

4. Macdonald, Development, 116.

5. Part of this work was edited by F. Kern in Cairo, 1902, another portion by J. Schacht in Leiden, 1933.

teachings, also objected to the doctrine of varying or ikhtilāf. Muslim scholars found it necessary to defend the liberty to have diversity against their attacks. (1)

Clearly, the intention of this chapter was to demonstrate that Ṭabarī broke with the Shī'ites on one of their fundamental teachings. He disapproved of the doctrine of the infallibility with regard to the Prophets, not to mention the imams. Sin and memory failure are both possible in their case. The principle of consensus has its value as a way to religious knowledge and no reference to the infallible imām in this respect is ever made. (2) All the consequences of the doctrine of the infallibility such as rejection of analogy and freedom to diversity should have no existence as far as Ṭabarī's position is concerned.

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1. e.g. Ghazālī, Faḍā'ih al-Bāṭiniyya, 100. Later the ikhtilāf grew up as one of the important sciences in which a jurist must be instructed, Ibn-Khaḍūn, Muqaddima, 381. Ghazālī attached no importance to 'ilm al-ikhtilāf which, in his view, should be totally ignored, ihyā', 1:35.
 2. The doctrine of infallibility is, in fact, elaborated as a substitute for the principle of the consensus of the community. See Alfred Guillaume, Islam, 117.

CHAPTER IV

The Doctrine of the Return

Although Shī'ism first emerged as a political movement defending the right of 'Alī-ibn-Abī-Ṭālib to succeed the Prophet, later it elaborated a scheme of theological and legal thinking. Many of its theological views, as we have seen in the previous chapter of infallibility, are related to the main issue of the imamate which form the core of difference between the two greatest Muslim sects, that is to say, the Sunnites and the Shī'ites. We have discussed so far two controversial problems, namely the imamate and the infallibility of the Prophets and the imams, to compare between the ideas developed by Ṭabarī and those held by the Shī'ites. Such a study will certainly enable us to view Ṭabarī's situation positively and objectively.

To take our study a step further, another theological problem will be examined here. This problem is known as the theory of the return or naẓariyyat ar-raj'a.⁽¹⁾ The return of the dead is one of the strange ideas brought by the Shī'ites into the history of Muslim thought. But to be specific, we

1. An independent work on the subject entitled ash-Shī'a wa-r-raj'a is composed by Muḥammad Riḍā an-Najafī, Najaf, 1955.

have to remember that the doctrine of the return enjoys no unanimous agreement among the Shī'ites. Al-Khayyāṭ, (1) a well-known member of the Mu'tazilite school, claimed that only the Imāmiyya or The Twelvers Shī'ite sub-division advocate the raj'a. An-Nawbakhtī in Firaq ash-Shī'a (2) informs us that some of the Shī'ites are undecided about it.

The Shī'ites who hold the doctrine of the return claim that their hidden imams, who vanished at various intervals during their long disrupted history, will re-appear in public life. The purpose of this re-appearance is to inflict vengeance on their enemies. Thus what they failed to achieve in their miserable past will be achieved in the foreseeable or unforeseeable future. The success of the enemies of ahl-al-bayt to persecute and do them every wrong is, therefore, not the end of the matter. The Shī'ite imams and their truthful followers will undoubtedly attain the final victory over their opponents.

According to the Shī'ites people are divided into three distinct categories. In the first place there are those who are endowed with strong and absolute faith. In the second place we find those who possess no faith at all. Thirdly and lastly we have the group of doubters whose faith is shaky. Not all the people will have the wonderful chance of returning from their

1. Intiṣār, 96.

2. 37; see also Tritton, Muslim Theology, 28.

graves before the Day of Judgement. Only the first and the second group will have the advantage of experiencing such a remarkable event. The doubters are deprived of it. They will be postponed till the Day of Resurrection; their case will be considered then. (1) When the war between the first and the second group is over, the result being the complete destruction of the Shī'ites' enemies, all of them will die again. The first, second and third groups will, however, be summoned again for the final questioning on the Last Day.

The doctrine of the return, as explained above, became one of the primary principles held by many Shī'ites. 'Abd-Allāh-Shabbir (d. 1242 A.H.), a Shī'ite author of the Imāmiyya sect, claimed that the belief in the raj'a is obligatory. No doubt about it can be tolerated. Anyone who questions this major principle should be excommunicated. (2) *صحيحه* *معتبره*

We have seen in the previous chapter how the Shī'ites took verse (Q.II:124) as evidence for their doctrine of the infallibility of the imams. Here again they made an effort of a similar character. They thought it best to appeal to the authority of the Qur'ān to see whether they could draw evidences supporting their doctrine of the return. By so doing they hoped that it might win acceptance or at least be looked at with

1. Shabbir, Ḥaqq, 2:4; Kāẓimī, Khaṣā'is, 498.

2. Ḥaqq, 2:48.

sympathy and consideration.

The verses of the Qur'ān upon which the Shī'ites attempt to base their doctrine of the raj'a are by no means few. Ten of these verses will be examined in this chapter to see if Ṭabarī agrees or disagrees with the interpretation given to them by advocates of the theological dogma of the return:-

(I) "How disbelieve ye in God when ye were dead and He gave life to you. Then He will give you death, then life again, and then unto him you will return". (Q.II:28).

(II) "They say: Our Lord! Twice hast Thou made us die, and twice hast thou made us live" (Q.XL:11).

(III) "And He it is who gave you life, then He cause you to die, and then will give you life again" (Q.XXII:66).

(IV) "And there is a ban upon any community which we have destroyed: that they shall not return" (Q.XXI:95).

(V) "And remind them of the Day when We shall gather out of every nation a host of those who denied our revelations and they will be set in array" (Q.XXVII:83). *— 35/15*

(VI) "And they swear by God their most binding oaths (that) God will not raise up him who dieth" (Q.XVI:38).

(VII) "He who hath given thee the Qur'ān for a law will surely bring thee ilā ma'ād" (Q. XXVIII:86).^{ou 85}

(VIII) "Who know that they will have to meet their Lord, and that unto him they are returning" (Q.II:46).

(IX) "Say: the angel of death, who hath charge concerning you, will gather you and afterward unto your Lord ye will be returned"(Q.XXXII:11).

(X) "And verily We make them taste the lower punishment before the greater, that haply they may return" (Q.XXXII:21).

The Shi'ites were labouring in vain as far as Ṭabarī was concerned. For him none of these ten verses of the Qur'ān could be taken as a foundation for the doctrine of the return. To have a closer and more specific look let us go to Ṭabarī's Tafsīr and see his remarks on each of these verses separately. He commented that verses (I) and (II) convey essentially the same meaning. The method of Ṭabarī in elucidating the meaning of the various verses of the Qur'ān was to expose them to different ways of interpretation. Several trends of thought are represented in his Tafsīr. Opposing views are gathered together and some of them are preferred to others. Reasons are in most cases given to strengthen the favoured views and weaken the rejected ones.

Following the above described method, Ṭabarī presented three ways of interpretation for (I) and (II):⁽¹⁾

(a) The first death of Man mentioned is a metaphorical one. Man according to this interpretation is said to be inert or khāmil, unimportant and totally ignorant of what is

1. Ṭ.T, 1:142-146; 24:28f.

running around him at the first stage; then God created in him life, the power of knowing and the various human faculties and activities; at the appointed time this productive life will terminate - the second natural death - and finally Man's life will be restarted again at the Day of Judgement. To illustrate that 'death' can bear that metaphorical sense of khāmil or without inherent power of action, Ṭabarī gives a poetic line by Nukhayla as-Sa'dī. (1)

(b) Man dies the natural death, then he is raised up in his grave and questioned, then dies for the second time and is finally raised at the account call.

(c) God created human beings out of the back of Adam. He took the covenant known as al-mīthāq from them that they should believe in Him and then caused them to die. Then He re-created them in the wombs of their mothers; again He gave them death at their appointed times and finally He will recall them at the day of Resurrection.

The first interpretation of the verses 'a' was accepted and defended by Ṭabarī. Both the second and third interpretations (b) and (c) were rejected by him. (b) was rejected on the grounds that God delivers his message to Man that he might repent. This is the only rational explanation for man being

1. Zamakhsharī acknowledges this metaphorical sense and gives the verse almost the same connotation as does Ṭabarī, Kashshāf, 1:50.

addressed by his creator. No such chance is available in the grave. Ṭabarī refused to accept (c) because according to it death and life are admitted thrice. The obvious sense of the verse, zāhir at-ta'wīl, to which we have to surrender points to the fact that there are but two lives. As we can see, therefore, Ṭabarī left no room whatsoever for the assumption that the dead will return to life before the call of the Hour. Not one of the interpretations (a), (b) and (c) ever refers to it.

Jābir al-Ja'fī was one of the early Shī'ites who believed in the doctrine of the return and he was accused by the Sunnites of telling lies.⁽¹⁾ Ṭabarī referred to him in his Tafsīr when dealing with the question of ar-raj'a. Jābir al-Ja'fī seems to be one of the disciples of the great Shī'ite leader Abū-Ja'far Muḥammad ibn-'Alī known as al-Bāqir to whom we referred earlier. Commenting on (IV), Ṭabarī related that Jābir al-Ja'fī asked Abū-Ja'far Muḥammad ibn-'Alī about the raj'a. Abu-Ja'far did no more than recite the verse in question. Nevertheless the denial of the doctrine of the return was categorically put into his mouth by Ṭabarī.⁽²⁾

1. Ibn-Hajar, Tahdhīb at-tahdhīb, 9:179.

2. Ṭ.T., 17:62.

The answer of Abū-Ja'far Muḥammad ibn-'Alī to the question of Jābir al-Ja'fī as related by Ṭabarī did not explicitly reject the doctrine of the return. It was Ṭabarī who intentionally made him object to it. He presumably wanted to show the Shī'ites that even their eminent religious figures swept away such a conviction.

Ṭabarī gave the word halāk mentioned in the verse an inner connotation. The word originally meant death. It, however, meant for Ṭabarī the sealing of the unbelievers hearts, because of their wrong⁽¹⁾ doing, so that they would never 'return' to God. Refusal to 'return' to God amounts to the same thing as refusal to repent.⁽²⁾ The interpretation given to the verse by Ṭabarī avoids any reference to the doctrine of the return. This is one of the few cases in which Ṭabarī sacrificed the obvious or the external meaning of the verses of the Qur'ān. When the Arabic word halāk is given that inner sense, there is hardly any sort of connection between the verse and the Shī'ite doctrine of raj'a.

Verse (V) is one of the most important Qur'ānic verses upon which the Shī'ites base their argument for the possibility of the return of the dead before the Day of Judgement.⁽³⁾ They maintain that unless we acknowledge the doctrine of the return

1. It is to be noticed that Ṭabarī never absolves human beings from responsibility as far as the question of sin is concerned.

2. Ṭ.T, 17:62.

3. See, for example, A.A.A. Fyzee, A Shī'ite creed, 65.

an obvious contradiction will unavoidably appear between verse (V) and verse (Q.XVIII:47) which runs as follows:

"We gather them together so as to leave not one of them behind."⁽¹⁾ They add that since the various verses of the Qur'an are in complete harmony with one another, we have to admit the existence of two different resurrections. The first resurrection takes place before the Day of Judgement. On this occasion only part of the people will assemble; this part comprises those whose faith is complete and steady and those who are absolutely faithless. To this resurrection, the Shī'ites maintain, we give the name raj'a.

The second resurrection, the Shī'ites follow up their argument, is of a different nature from the previous one. It only occurs at the Day of Judgement where all and every individual being will be called upon to present his account for settlement. This is the reason why the Qur'an speaks on one occasion of "gathering out of every nation a host" (Q.XXVII:83) and on another of "gathering them together so as to leave not one of them behind" (Q.XVIII:47).

Ṭabarī presented a completely different point of view from that expressed by the Shī'ites. The meaning of the verse is as simple as it could ever be. The first host or fawj mentioned

1. For this argument see Shabbir, Ḥaqq, 2:4; Kāzīmī, Khaṣā'is, 503.

in the verse will be detained for the coming of the last host of the disbelievers. When the first and the last host gather together, all of them will be cast into fire. (1) The verse, therefore, has nothing to do with the question of the raj'a and its meaning is evident without complicating matters.

Some Shi'ite extremists treated (VI) as referring to 'Alī ibn-Abī-Ṭālib in particular. He is alleged to be lifted up alive to the clouds and he would descend one day and kill his enemies. (2) According to their interpretation, the doctrine of the return has its representation in the descent of 'Alī from the clouds to take revenge from his opponents. Ṭabarī had, as it might be anticipated, no faith in such a legend. Ibn-'Abbās, who is claimed by the Shi'ites, is represented in Ṭabarī's Tafsīr as rejecting the fable solemnly. He ironically commented that had it come to their knowledge that 'Alī was still alive, they would have abstained from marrying his wives and distributing his wealth. (3)

Verse (VII) is a topic of much controversy among Qur'ān's commentators. Three ways of interpreting it are presented by Ṭabarī. (4) (a) The phrase ilā ma'ād equals ilā 'āda i.e. habit

1. Ṭ.T, 20:11.

2. Ibn-Ḥazm, Fīṣal, 2:114; Ibn-Khaldūn, Lubāb al-muḥaṣṣal, 128; Rāzī, I'tiqādāt, 53.

3. Ṭ.T, 14:66.

4. Ibid., 20: 72-74.

and not 'awd or return. According to this interpretation God is foretelling his messenger that he is going to die.

Death is the ultimate end of every human life. The mortality of human beings is thus the 'āda or the natural fact of life.

(b) The expression is an indication from God that the Prophet will have the opportunity to return to his native country Mecca. The verse, therefore, refers to the victorious campaign led by the Prophet and his Companions known as the Opening of Mecca or Fath Mecca. (c) Ilā ma'ād is a promise that the Prophet will enter paradise or rather re-enter it as he had already done so during the Night Journey. Ṭabarī favoured (a) and (b). Again it is to be noticed that he spared no place for the Shī'ites doctrine of the return. For them the verse is conclusive evidence that the Prophet will return to life before resurrection. (1)

Ṭabarī took (VIII) to be a warning from God to the disbelievers. If they do not return to God and repent they will suffer two forms of punishment inflicted at different intervals. The first form of punishment will be imposed in this life. The Qur'ānic terminology calls this al-'adhāb al-adnā. The second punishment is, however, postponed until the Day of Judgement. The Qur'ān calls this al-'adhāb al-akbar. The disbeliever's misfortunes, hunger and their death by the sword of the Muslims

1. Shabbir, Haqq, 2:6.

belong to the first type of punishment. Ṭabarī even refused to accept that al-'adhāb al-adnā will be suffered in the grave. It is inflicted in this ordinary life.⁽¹⁾ The Shī'ites are quite definite that the verse refers to their doctrine of the return. 'Abd-Allāh Shabbir⁽²⁾ maintains that al-'adhāb al-adnā stands for the torment imposed upon disbelievers in the period of the return.⁽³⁾

Indeed, for Ṭabarī there was at least one evident fact upon which both believers and disbelievers agreed: None of the dead will 'return' to this life; although the believers, of course, believe that they will return on the day of resurrection.⁽³⁾

The Return of the Mahdī, Sufyānī and Jesus Christ

The Shī'ites were and still are eagerly waiting the coming of Muḥammad ibn-al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī known as the Mahdī in spite of the fact that more than one thousand, one hundred years has elapsed since his mysterious disappearance in about 260 A.H.⁽⁴⁾ He is said to disappear twice: one continued for about 68 years and is known as al-ghayba aṣ-ṣuġra and the other al-ghayba al-kubra from 260 A.H. and onwards until he is allowed

1. Ṭ.T, 21:63.

2. Haqq, 2:37.

3. Ṭ.T, 28:51.

4. See Khāliṣī, Islām, 25; Macdonald, Development, 80.

by God to reappear. (1)

Muhammad ibn-al-Ḥasan, who is also known as ṣāhib az-zamān, (2) occupies a prominent place in Shī'ite thinking. The very existence and maintenance of the universe entirely depends on him. In spite of the importance attached to the idea of the Mahdī, Ṭabarī made no reference to it in his Tafsīr except once. Commenting on the verse "And who doth greater wrong than he who forbiddeth the approach to the sanctuaries of God lest his name should be mentioned therein, and striveth for their ruin? As for such, it was never meant that they should enter them except in fear. Theirs in the world is ignominy and theirs in the Hereafter is an awful doom" (Q.II:114), he related on the authority of as-Suddī, the famous Shī'ite commentator, that the ignominy mentioned in the verse will be inflicted by the Mahdī. (3)

Unfortunately, Ṭabarī was silent on this sensitive issue. He did not say whether or not he accepted the view. Even if he had held the belief in the Mahdī, this would not have proved his association with the Shī'ites. In spite of the fact that the Shī'ites are more occupied or even obsessed with the idea of the Mahdī, the Sunnites, or at least many of them, advocated a

1. Khāliṣī, Ihyā', 1:99; Shabbir, Haqq, 1:309.

2. For the other nicknames see, Khāliṣī, Ihyā', 1:99.

3. This will happen by the time he captures Constantinople!, Ṭ.T, 1:377.

similar conception. ⁽¹⁾ A tradition attributed to the Prophet about the Mahdī is to be found in the collections of Traditions of at-Tirmidhī. ⁽²⁾

Not only the Mahdī but also a Sufyānī had a place in Ṭabarī's Tafsīr. This Sufyānī, it is related on the authority of the Prophet, will wage war on Banū-l-'Abbās, confiscate their properties and kill a great many of them. The Umayyids, who were the traditional rivals of Banū-Hāshim throughout their history, found encouragement in this legend of Sufyānī. ⁽³⁾ The name itself suggests how the prevailing political conditions coloured people's theological convictions.

The legend of the Sufyānī goes on to maintain that at the end of his career, the Sufyānī will be absolutely defeated in spite of his triumph described above. The Shī'ites have no doubt about this. For them the coming out of the Sufyānī is one of the signs of the Hour. ⁽⁴⁾ He seems to take the same position of ad-Dajjāl - the abhorred figure who will be slaughtered either by the Mahdī or Jesus Christ.

The tradition of the Sufyānī attributed to the Prophet,

1. The idea of the Mahdī finds fertile soil in many minds. One of the distinctive doctrines of the Qādiānīs, for example, is that "belief in Mīrzā Ghulām Aḥmad al-Qādiānī as the Messiah, Mahdī, is an article of faith. Faith is incomplete without it", - A. Guillaume, Islam, 127.
2. Ṣaḥīḥ, 9:74f.
3. See B. Lewis, Abbāsids, E. I., 1:17.
4. Shabbir, Ḥaqq, 1:309.

دافع بقرآن =
 فابوليسه =
 رده =
 تخرافه =
 توقيف اللفظ =

which is an obvious fabulous story, finds its representation in the Tafsīr of Ṭabarī. Dealing with the verse "Couldst thou but see when they are terrified with no escape, and are seized from near at hand" (Q.XXXIV:51), Ṭabarī asked the question when does this terrifying experience take place? Three answers are ⁽¹⁾ given and the Sufyānī's time is one of them. These are:-

(a) during the lifetime of the Prophet. Following this interpretation, the verse is a clear prediction of the disastrous situation prepared for the disbelievers who will be utterly damaged by the Prophet and his Companions.

(b) at the end of the world for which the presence of the Sufyānī is an evident indication.

(c) by the time they (the disbelievers) get out of their tombs in great terror.

Ṭabarī sometimes appeared to be completely uncritical about the information he obtained from the different sources. The content of the Sufyānī tradition which seems to belong to the Marwānī period was never criticized by him. Nevertheless he refused to associate the verse in question with it. This was based on the grounds that no reference was made to Sufyānī in that connection. The fact that Ṭabarī saw no relation between

1. Ṭ.T, 22:64.

the tradition of the Sufyānī and the verse he was struggling to explain did not show his doubt about the very existence of that mysterious character. Indeed it is difficult to tell whether he really believes in the coming of the Sufyānī or not. (c) is also rejected because the verse describes the conditions of the persistent disbelievers at the time of the Prophet and not after it.

The material at our disposal is too slender to support a judgement whether or not Ṭabarī had a belief in either of the two wonderful characters: the Mahdī or the Sufyānī. Whether they will return to this world or not remains uncertain as far as Ṭabarī's theological position is concerned. We are in a better position to determine his views about the return of Jesus Christ. The fact that he had a firm belief in the descent of Jesus Christ from heaven is beyond doubt. He explicitly advocated this article of belief on several occasions in his Tafsīr.⁽¹⁾ The descent of Jesus will certainly occur but when is a different question. It is one of the mutashābih verses of the Qur'ān. No one knows the definite time of the coming out of Jesus save God, ista'thra⁽²⁾ Allāh^u bi 'ilmihⁱ.

1. See, for example, 6:12-14; 4:183-185.

2. Ibid., 1:30.

Ṭabarī tells us that the question of the return of Jesus Christ to this world before the Day of Judgement is categorically embodied in the authentic traditions attributed to the Prophet. It is not, however, so openly admitted in the Qur'ān. Prophetic sayings dealing with the issue at hand are quoted by him. Even the minute physical features of Jesus Christ are most vividly described in these Prophetic traditions. (1) Jesus will kill the false messiah, known as ad-Dajjāl, destroy the Cross and slaughter the Pig. (2) For the Shī'ites the emphasis is made on the Mahdī rather than Jesus. It is he who will kill ad-Dajjāl. (3)

Jesus, Ṭabarī related, will impose the tribute known in the Islamic terminology as the jizya on the disbelievers. He will annihilate all religions with the exception of the Ḥanīfiyya, the religion of Abraham. There is, as it might be immediately noticed, an obvious contradiction in this tradition related by Ṭabarī. Since nothing but the Ḥanīfiyya are going to be spared, the imposing of the jizya by Jesus on disbelievers is completely out of question. Ṭabarī took no notice of this ridiculous contradiction. (4)

1. Ṭ.T, 6:14.

2. Cf. Baghdādī, Farq, 343; Bazdawī, Uṣūl, 244.

3. Khālīṣī, Inyā', 1:65.

4. Ṭ.T, 6:12.

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The doctrine of the return of Jesus Christ at some point of time in the future has its representation, Ṭabarī claimed, in the Qur'ān also. The verse "there is not one of the people of the Scripture but will believe in him before his death" (Q.IV:159) is one of the few Qur'ānic verses which has something to do with the question we are tackling. The point is to whom does this 'him' and 'his' refer. Different interpretations⁽¹⁾ are given as usual:-

(a) Both refer to Jesus Christ. The meaning of the verse will be, therefore, that all the people of the Book who will be present at the descent of Jesus Christ are going to believe in him before his death. Ṭabarī, who accepted this point of view, commented that a particular group of ahl-al-kitāb are meant by this verse and not all of them.

(b) 'him' refers to Jesus while 'his' refers to the kitābī. Holders of this view support their position by adhering to the reading of Ubayy ibn-Ka'b - qabla mawtihim in plural instead of qabla mawtihi in singular. Qabla mawtihi is, however, the more popular reading.

(c) 'him' refers to Prophet Muḥammad and 'his' to the

1. Ṭ.T, 6:12-14.

people of the Book. According to this interpretation every individual Christian or Jew will believe in the prophecy of Muḥammad before his final departure. Ṭabarī rejected this interpretation on the grounds that no reference whatsoever is made to Prophet Muḥammad either before or after the verse in view. For him the general theme of the verses was the Jews and Christ; this particular verse should, therefore, be looked at in the light of other verses connected with it.

Another verse subject to different interpretations by the holders of the doctrine of the return of Jesus Christ is this: "(And remember) when God said: O Jesus! Lo! I am gathering thee mutawaffika ⁽¹⁾ and causing thee to ascent on me", (Q. III: ^{48/}55). What is meant by the verb mutawaffika? Some Muslim commentators are, in my view, doing violence to language and grammar to distort the obvious meaning of the verb - causing you to die - in order to suit their pre-conceived doctrine. Even Ṭabarī, who made every effort to keep the Qur'ān away from misrepresentation, seemed to follow the popular doctrine at the expense of the obvious sense of the verb. Thus mutawaffika meant for him taking you alive, qābiḍuka ḥayy^{an}.

1. Ṭ.T, 4:183-185.

Others held that the verb must have its original sense but should be understood in the light of the traditional teaching i.e. causing you to die after your return to this world! For another group, including al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, mutawaffika meant causing you to sleep. Both of these interpretations are rejected by Ṭabarī although the outcome is the same, namely Jesus Christ is lifted up to heaven alive. (1) All this aims, of course, at preparing the way for the doctrine of his re-coming.

While the Sunnites emphasize the descent of Jesus, the Shī'ites emphasize the coming of the Mahdī. Some of the Sunnites, as we have seen in Chapter I, even made an attempt to eliminate the Mahdī maintaining that Jesus is the only person to come to the rescue of humanity at the end of the world. The Shī'ites, as a matter of fact, recognize both the Mahdī and Christ, but the rôle played by Jesus in their theology is incredibly inferior to that played by the Mahdī. Thus the Mahdī will lead Jesus in prayer. (2) He and not Jesus will get rid of ad-Dajjāl as we have remarked before. Gabriel and Michael will do him homage between the corner and the station. (3)

في البيت
من البيت
في البيت

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1. Cf. al-'Izz ibn-'Abd-as-Salām, al-Fawā'id, 56.
 2. Ibn-Furāt, Tafsīr, 44; Shabbir, Ḥaqq, 2:10.
 3. Tritton, M. Theology, 25.

The Sunnites who claim that there is no Mahdī other than Christ to whom alone people should look for salvation are bitterly criticized by the Shī'ites. ⁽¹⁾ If we eliminate the Mahdī from the picture, a tremendous portion of Shī'ite literature will eventually vanish.

One would instantly notice that the concept of Christ and the Mahdī are essentially similar in most respects. Both of them will impose justice and peace. Both will kill the anti-Christ known as ad-Dajjāl. Legends are formed round their names. For Ṭabarī Jesus will bring justice and peace to the suffering world to the extent that lions are reared with camels and children play with snakes. ⁽²⁾ For the Shī'ites the dwelling of birds with snakes in one hole is one of the characteristics of the peaceful age of the Mahdī. ⁽³⁾ This rosy world created by the vivid imagination of Muslims led some of the scholars such as Goldziher ⁽⁴⁾ to maintain the view that the idea was invented by wishful thinking to escape the misfortunes of the present by living in a false, prosperous and peaceful future. ⁽⁴⁾

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1. Kāzīmī, Khaṣā'is, 493.
 2. T.T, 6:14.
 3. Qummī, Maqālāt, 31.
 4. Vorlesungen, 86.

The fact that foreign elements, such as the Persians, Christians and Jews, played a considerable part in inventing, encouraging and propagating the doctrine of the return seems to be ⁽¹⁾ certain. 'Abd-Allāh ibn-Sabā', a converted Jew, was the first to teach the return of 'Alī ibn-Abī-Ṭālib ⁽²⁾ after his death. Ka'b al-Aḥbār and Wahb ibn-Munabbih of the Yemen are the two Champions of the Prophetic traditions concerning the descent of Jesus Christ contained in Ṭabarī's Tafsīr. ⁽³⁾ Kuthayyir 'Azza, the poet with outspoken Shī'ite tendencies in the Umayyad era, made it abundantly clear in one of his lines that it is Ka'b al-Aḥbār who informed them that Muḥammad ibn-al-Ḥanafiyya is the expected Mahdī. ⁽⁴⁾

It is to be admitted, however, that the real difference between the Sunnites and the Shī'ites does not concern the Mahdī, Sufyānī or Jesus Christ. The heart of difference is whether the dead believers and disbelievers will return to this world before the Day of Judgement. Ṭabarī, as we have seen, stood firmly against the Shī'ite teachings in this respect. No one in his senses, he held, would tolerate such an absurdity, namely the rise of the dead before Resurrection. ⁽⁵⁾ Thus the doctrine of the return as taught by the Shī'ites was strongly condemned by him.

1. Goldziher, Vorlesungen, 228; Tritton, M. Theology, 22; B. Lewis, Ismā'ilism, 24ff. Massignon, however, takes a different point of view of Mahdism, Ibid, 25.

2. Qummī, Maqālāt, 20.

3. 4: 183-185.

4. Qummī, Maqālāt, 171.

5. Ṭ.T, 28:51.

CHAPTER V

The Doctrine of Abrogation.

Abrogation, generally known as naskh,⁽¹⁾ raf' or maḥw, is one of the doctrines which acquired a special position of importance in the history of Islam. Fakhr ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī claims that the prophethood of Muḥammad cannot be proved or justified in the principle of abrogation is to be eliminated from the picture.⁽²⁾

Each sect viewed the conception of abrogation in the light of its own theological teachings. The Mu'tazilites held the fact that some verses of the Qur'ān are abrogated to be one of the clearest evidences for the validity of the doctrine of the creation of the Qur'ān.⁽³⁾ Both Zamakhsharī in his Kashshāf⁽⁴⁾ and Khayyāṭ in Intiṣār⁽⁵⁾ thought it necessary to link up the principle of abrogation with their wider concept of maṣlaḥa i.e. it is necessary that God should chose what is best for his creatures.

For the Shī'ites the principle of abrogation should be looked

1. For the various meanings of naskh see: T.T, 1:358; Rāzī, Mafātīḥ, 1:432ff; Nisābūrī, Raghā'ib, 1:352; A. Jeffery, Islām, 66f.
2. Mafātīḥ, 1:433.
3. Ibid., 1:437; A. Amīn, Duḥā, 3:36.
4. 1:537.
5. 27.

at in the light of the doctrine of infallibility of the Imams which we have discussed in Chapter III. Abrogation, they maintain, is one of the justifications for the existence of the infallible Imams who are supposed to demonstrate to the community the abrogated and the affirmed verses of the Qur'ān. Without the idea of the infallible Imams such a knowledge is completely impossible. Since the knowledge of abrogation comes from the infallible Imams, no trifling over the issue is permitted. (1)

Some of the Shī'ites, namely the Rawāfiḍ advocated the view that the question of abrogation of the verses of the Qur'ān is entirely left to the decision of their infallible leaders. Their word is final in this respect and the masses of the people are to accept the outcome of their binding decrees. (2) This is no more than a nonsensical rambling speech as far as Ṭabarī's position, which will be examined soon, is concerned.

The Ṣūfīs, or ahl-al-ishāra, as they are sometimes called, take a different point of view as regards the point at issue. For them abrogation stands for the movement of the Ṣūfī worshipper, generally known as as-sālik, from one spiritual condition to another. (3)

1. Shabbir, Ḥaqq, 1:182f.

2. Ash'arī, Maqālāt, 2:611. The Yazīdiyya of the Ibādites, a Kharijite sub-division, claimed that in the last days the religious law of Islam will be abrogated, Baghdādī, Farq, 13f.

3. Nīsābūrī, Raghā'ib, 1:356.

Ṭabarī held that no-one except the Prophet had the right to determine whether or not a verse of the Qur'ān is abrogated. It is the Muslim community, through traditions received from the Prophet, and not the infallible Imams who can decide on the question of abrogation. Ṭabarī stressed the view that abrogation is a matter of narration or riwāya. Intellectual speculation has nothing to do with it. The famous mental activity of ijtihād is inapplicable here.

Most Muslim scholars are of the view that the share of al-mu'ālafat^u qulūbuhum mentioned in the verse "the alms are only for the poor and the needy and those who collect them and those whose hearts are to be reconciled ... etc." (Q.IX:16) is abrogated by Abū-Bakr and/or 'Umar, the first two Caliphs. Ṭabarī was not prepared to associate himself with this point of view. ⁽¹⁾ He maintained that no one is endowed with the authority of cancelling or abrogating what God has established. Ṭabarī repeatedly asserted that abrogation is the work and right of God and the creatures, whether imams or ordinary men have nothing to do with it. ⁽²⁾

The principle of abrogation is closely related to the doctrine of the infallibility of the Prophets upon which we

1. Ṭ.T, 10:99f.

2. e.g. Ṭ.T, 2:194.

dwelt in Chapter III. As I have remarked before, Ṭabarī defended the view that Prophet Muhammad's memory could be and in fact was, defective in certain respects. He accepted the view that both the text and the prescription of a verse can be abrogated. Abū-Mūsā-l-Ash'arī is reported to have said that the Prophet and his companions used to consider, "Did man possess two valleys full of money, he would surely desire a third beside. Naught will fill man's belly save the dust. God forgives one who repents" as a verse of the Qur'ān.⁽¹⁾ Holding such views as this and that of the gharānīq to which we referred before will lead to sheer disbelief in the eyes of the Shī'ites.

The Shī'ites objected violently to the previously mentioned type of abrogation. Nevertheless, they, or at least a good many of them, are prepared to extend the principle of abrogation and its application far and wide. They adhere, for example, to the doctrine of al-badā' which we will examine later. Here it is sufficient to observe that it is an excessive application of the doctrine of abrogation.

Muslims adopted three different attitudes as far as the principle of abrogation is concerned. Some of them rejected the conception altogether. Ubayy ibn-Ka'b, the famous Companion

1. T.T., 1:361. Some fond of such stories related that the Prophet and his Companions used to learn a chapter by heart in the evening and by the next morning they forgot all about it. This is added to the miraculous events of the Prophet, Nīsābūrī, Raghā'ib, 1:356.

of the Prophet, belonged to this group. Rejecting the principle, he is reported to have said, "I will never abandon any of what I heard, lā ada'u shay^{an} sami'tuhu". (1) 'Umar ibn-al-Khaṭṭāb admitted that Ubayy ibn-Ka'b had the most extensive knowledge of the Qur'ān. Despite this fact, he was reluctant to accept his views because of his denial of abrogation. (2)

The view held by Ubayy ibn-Ka'b was later taken up enthusiastically by Abū-Muslim al-Aṣfahānī (d. 322 A.H.) of the Mu'tazilite school. (3) For him no abrogation could be admitted as far as the verses of the Qur'ān are concerned. Abrogation mentioned in the Qur'ān should be interpreted in either of two ways: (a) the reference to abrogation must be directed to the laws prescribed in the ancient books such as the Old Testament, (b) the naskh stands for the transmission of information from the preserved Tablet, al-lawḥ al-maḥfūz, to the various holy books such as Old Testament, Old Testament and the Qur'ān. The total denial of abrogation is wholly based on the Qur'ānic verse, "Falsehood cannot come at it from before it or behind it. It is a revelation from the Wiser, the praise worthy" (Q.XLI:42).

1. Qaṣṭalānī, Irshād, 7:13.

2. Bukhārī, Ṣaḥīḥ, 3:196f.

3. Rāzī, Mafātīḥ, 1:435; Baghdādī, Uṣūl, 227; Nīsābūrī, Raghā'ib, 1:353-355; aṣ-Ṣāliḥ, Mabāḥith, 262.

The group of Ubayy ibn-Ka'b, who seems to be the father of the denial of the notion of abrogation, and Abū-Muslim al-Aṣfahānī is directly opposed by a substantial group belonging to the Shī'ite school of thought. This group asserts that the principle of abrogation could be extended not only to cover the field of law - commandments and prohibitions - but informative statement, al-akhbār, as well.⁽¹⁾ Indeed, abrogation is used by some Muslim thinkers in a very wide sense. They maintain, for example that things existing in the Universe at a definite point of time abrogate the former existing ones.⁽²⁾

The third and last group is of the view that abrogation is essentially restricted to the realm of law which marks commanded and prohibited things, al-amr wa-n-nahy. The first and the second group seem to be on two opposite scales, the firm denial of the theory of abrogation as a whole and the undue extension of its application. Ṭabarī, together with the overwhelming majority of Sunnites and Mu'tazalites, thought it necessary to seek an intermediary position between the two extremes. This they can achieve by advocating a third moderate view different from that held by the first and the second group.

For Ṭabarī and others the Qur'ān referred to the notion

1. Ash'arī, Maqālāt, 2: 478f; Qurtubī, Aḥkām, 2:57; Khayyāt, Intiṣār, 93; Mashkūr, Comm. Qummī Maqālāt, 210f.
2. Nīsābūrī, Raghā'ib, 1:356.

of abrogation in very clear and emphatic language. There is no point, they thought, in sweeping away what the Qur'ān had openly acknowledged on a number of occasions. The following verses of the Qur'ān are said to make up the basis of the argument for the authenticity of abrogation: (1)

(I) "Such of Our revelations (verses) as We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, We bring (in place) one better or the like thereof. Knowest thou not that God is able to do all things"? (Q. II:106)¹⁰⁰

(II) "God effaceth what He will and establisheth (what He will), and with Him is the source of ordinance, umm al-kitāb" (2)
(Q. XIII:39)

(III) "And when We put a revelation in place of (another) revelation - and God knoweth best what He revealeth - they say: Lo! thou art but an inventor. Most of them know not. Say: the holy spirit, rūḥ al-quḍs, hath revealed it from thy Lord with truth" (Q. XVI:101f)¹⁰³

1. See also, R. Bell, Introduction to the Qur'ān, 98; A. Jeffery, Islam, 66.

2. Umm al-kitāb, literally the mother of the Book, occurred more than once in the Qur'ān. It is interpreted by Ṭabarī to mean the origin of the book, Ṭ.T, 3:105; 13:101. Some took it to mean the Preserved Tablet, aṣ-Ṣāliḥ, Mabāḥith, 260. Others claimed that the verse has nothing to do with abrogation. It meant for them, "God abolishes the sin (on repentance) and establishes the repentance", al-Māturīdī, Sharḥ al-fiqh al-akbar, 11.

(IV) "Never sent We a messenger or a Prophet before thee but when he recited, tamannā, (the message) Satan proposed (opposition) in respect of that which he recited thereof. But God abolisheth that which Satan proposeth. Then God establisheth His revelations. God is knower wise" (Q.XXII:52)

(V) "We shall make thee recite (O Muhammad) so that thou shall not forget, save that which God willeth. He indeed knoweth the disclosed and that which one conceals" (Q.LXXXVII:6-8)

The view expressed by the Shī'ites that the principle of abrogation can embrace the domain of informative statements was regularly attacked by Ṭabarī. He constantly and continuously denied that abrogation is so flexible as to include the field of al-akhbār.⁽¹⁾ Statements specially constructed to convey information about the past, present or future can by no means be abrogated. To declare a former khābar pronounced by the Prophet as null and void means for him nothing less than telling absurd and ridiculous lies. This is certainly impossible in the case of God and his living word, the Qur'ān.

Ṭabarī obviously had in mind the Shī'ite doctrine of al-bīdā'^a, which will be readily discussed, when he repeatedly claimed that no informative pronouncement declared by God at

1. See, for example, T.T, 1:358; 30:8.

one stage could conceivably be cancelled or crossed out at a later stage. The confinement of the theory of abrogation in Ṭabarī's view to the sphere of law is a theological necessity. If abrogation is extended so far as to embrace al-akhbār, it will ultimately culminate in God's ignorance and dishonesty.

The doctrine of al-badā':

Al-badā' is derived from the arabic word badā⁽¹⁾ meaning "appeared to be". Thus badā lī means it appeared to me and badā Lī-Allāh means it appeared to God. The Shī'ites developed a serious doctrine⁽²⁾ about God as being subject to various things appearing to him every now and then. His mind and decrees are not always unchangeable. In fact they are in a state of perpetual flux.

"God occasionally put down something on the tablets of maḥw and ithbāt i.e. those liable for both negation and confirmation. Some of the fortunate angels may have had the chance to experience what was going on and through the mediation of these angels some Prophets or apostles received information about these things which could be out of existence at any moment. The messenger then tells his community about

1. See aṣ-Ṣāliḥ's footnote 3, Mabāḥith, 271.

2. For this doctrine see, Shabbir, Ḥaqq, 1:101-105; Shahrastānī, Milal, 1:197f.

the things he obtained information about from the angel. Thus things are liable not to be in complete harmony with what the Prophet has said. Information received from the Prophet is altered and something else came up into existence. In short one can say that al-badā' in the domain of creation, 'ālam at-takwīn, holds the same position as that of abrogation in the domain of law, 'ālam at-tashrī'. (1)

The Shī'ites maintained that there is hardly any difference between the notion of al-badā' and abrogation. Since it is utterly conceivable, as all Muslims agree with the exception of a few such as the Mu'tazilite scholar Abū-Muslim al-Aṣfahānī, to abrogate an injunction received from God, there is no reason why an informative statement cannot be treated in the same manner. Al-Murtaḍā, a Shī'ite scholar of Mu'tazilite tendencies, held that the concept of abrogation and that of al-badā' are essentially the same even from a linguistic point of view. (2)

Two tablets are recognized by the Shī'ite school of theology, (a) al-lawḥ al-mahfūz or the preserved tablet where no alteration or change is thinkable and (b) lawḥ al-mahw wa-l-ithbāt or the tablet of effacement and establishment which is in continuous and restless movement. (3)

1. Mashkūr, Comm. Quṣṣī maqālāt, 210f.

2. Shabbir, Ḥṣṣq, 1:103.

3. Ibid, 1:104f.

Again, the Shī'ite resorted to the Qur'ān to seek support for their doctrine of al-bidā'. Their efforts in this respect are not frustrated. The doctrine of al-bidā' is said to have its representation in this verse: "Every day He is occupied with an important affair" (Q.LV:29). The Shī'ites maintained that the verse indicated in abundantly clear language that the process of creation is in no respect over. During the process of continuous evolution allowance is given for affirmation and negation by the creator. Al-badā' is, therefore, far from being impossible to imagine or conceive by a rational being.

An example given by 'Abd-Allāh Shabbir of how informative statements are altered or abrogated is this: It is written on the tablet of negation and affirmation that the age of a certain person will terminate at the age of forty. This is not an altogether final statement. God has absolute freedom to change it according to circumstances. The person whose age is said to end at forty may do a good or a bad deed which will result in either increase or decrease in the number of these years. A Prophet or even a designated imām, wasī, who refers to that changeable tablet is thus liable to get the wrong information. The people, however, have to submit to their word. They are not free to have the least doubts about the information they obtain from them despite the possibility of its

being changed. (1)

The imams of those who accepted the doctrine of al-bidā' took every advantage of it. Whenever they tell their followers of something which proves to be untrue they appeal to that magical doctrine. It gives them an easy way out to say the words: "badā lī-Allāh fīhi" i.e. it appeared to God that He should change his mind in that particular situation. (2)

The Kaysāniyya, adherents of Muḥammad ibn-al-Ḥanafiyya, and al-Mukhtāriyya, followers of al-Mukhtār ibn-'Ubayd ath-Thaqafī who advocated the same cause, all agreed upon the doctrine of al-badā'. (3) Although the doctrine of al-badā' is peculiar (4) to the Shī'a, we have to remember that not all of them stuck to it. Sulaymān ibn-Jarīr, to whom we referred when dealing with the difficulty of confusion of names, criticized the principle fiercely. It is a well-known fact that he belongs to the Zaydite sect which constitutes a large portion of moderate Shī'ites who agree with the Sunnites on many religious points. (5)

1. Shabbir, Ḥaqq, 1:104.
2. Ibn-Khaldūn, Lubāb al-muḥaṣṣal, 134.
3. Shahrastānī, Milal, 1:197; Baghdādī, Farq, 38 and 50ff; Bazdawī, Uṣūl, 248.
4. Tritton, M. Theology, 31.
5. B. Lewis, Ismā'īlism, 30.

The doctrine of abrogation gave birth to difficulties in the field of jurisprudence e.g. which of which is abrogated. "The number of abrogated verses have been variously estimated by commentators as from five to five hundred!"⁽¹⁾ Abrogation is thus considered one of the biggest questions of uṣūl al-fiqh, roots of law.⁽²⁾ Ṭabarī tells us in his Tafsīr⁽³⁾ that he discussed it in detail in his book entitled al-Bayān 'an uṣūl al-aḥkām. The doctrine of al-badā' in its turn brought about grave theological difficulties. The primary problem in this connection is that of God's knowledge.

God's Knowledge:

Two important figures in the history of Shī'ite theology claimed that knowledge of things before they actually happen is impossible even in the case of God. These are the theologians Hishām ibn-al-Ḥakam and Muḥammad ibn-an-Nu'mān, better known among the Sunnites as Shayṭān aṭ-Ṭāq.⁽⁴⁾ God's knowledge, they teach, is an attribute of Him which cannot be described as eternal or originated; this is because an attribute cannot be described or defined.

1. E.B., 13:483f.

2. Ash'arī, Maqālāt, 2:478.

3. 1:381.

4. The Shī'ites used to call him mū'min aṭ-Ṭāq i.e. the believer of aṭ-Ṭāq instead of Shayṭān aṭ-Ṭāq, the devil of aṭ-Ṭāq, Nawbakhtī, Firaq, 66.

It is clear that the view expressed by Hishām ibn-al-Hakam and Muḥammad ibn-an-Nu'mān is in complete accordance with the Shī'ite doctrine of al-badā'. According to their teaching God possesses no accurate knowledge of things until they are brought into actual existence. No pre-knowledge of things is ever possible. Things, therefore, might appear contrary to what He already perceived. This is called al-badā' fī-l-'ilm.⁽¹⁾ The idea expressed by these theologians is by no means new. Both Ibn-Ḥazm⁽²⁾ and Shahrastānī⁽³⁾ tell us that it is borrowed from Jahm ibn-Ṣafwān.

For Ṭabarī God's knowledge of things is supreme and conclusive. There is no question about this central fact. He knows every individual unit, big or small.⁽⁴⁾ The following verse of the Qur'ān is drawn as an illustration of this primary conception "He is the knower of the unseen. Not an atom's weight, or less than that or greater, escapeth Him in the heavens or in the earth but it is in a clear record" (Q.XXXIV:3).

Some Muslim scholars, who were dominated by Greek philosophy and culture, argued that God has only universals,

1. Shahrastānī, Milal, 1:197f and 2:23; Mashkūr, Comm. Qummi Maq., 232.
2. Fīṣal, 2:128.
3. Milal, 1:109.
4. See, for instance, Ṭ.T, 3:6; 22:37f. Many contemporary Shī'ites, such as Khālīṣī, would certainly agree with this, Ihyā', 1:34.

kulliyāt, within his comprehension and not particulars, juz'īyyāt.⁽¹⁾ The view expressed by Ṭabarī concerning the knowledge of God is in direct opposition to both the Shī'ites and the so-called Muslim philosophers.

The Shī'ites who thought that God has no pre-knowledge of things felt it necessary to make an attempt to find representation for their view in the Qur'ān. The verse "And verily We shall try you till we know those of you who strive hard (for the cause of God) and the steadfast, and till We test your record" (Q.XLVIII:31) is taken as evidence that no prior knowledge of things is conceivable.

Ṭabarī believed that such verses of the Qur'ān whose external meaning seems to suggest or indicate that God lacks knowledge of things before they exist must be interpreted otherwise. Thus when God says: "And We appointed the qibla which ye formerly observed only that We might know him who followeth the messenger, from him who turneth on his heels, i.e. who refuseth to follow" (Q.II:143), the expression should be directed to refer to the Prophet and the believers. It is the prophet and his followers who have no pre-knowledge of things and not God whose knowledge is absolute.⁽²⁾

1. Cf. W.M. Watt, I.Q., VI:8.

2. T.T, 2:8.

The Jews held that abrogation necessarily implies telling lies and making false statements on one occasion or another. They waged a sweeping attack on the principle of abrogation to which they wholly objected.⁽¹⁾ No discrimination between an-naskh, abrogation, and al-badā', the state of changing God's mind on certain informative statements, is ever made by them.⁽²⁾ Ṭabarī, together with a substantial number of Muslims sought to counteract the attack led by the Jews by distinguishing between two kinds of statements. In the first place we find statements dealing with the "do" and "undo". To abrogate statements of this kind has nothing to do with the notion of falsehood.

In the second place we find statements which deal with information. To abrogate statements of this type necessarily involves contradiction. By definition, one of them must be false. If, for example, we say Hell exists and later we abrogate this statement by declaring that Hell does not exist, we must be wrong in either of these statements. Ṭabarī and many Muslim scholars are in accord with the Jews as far as statements of this style are concerned. To admit abrogation in such cases is the same as asserting that God is a liar.

The distinction between informative and legal statements

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1. Rāzī, I'tiqādāt, 82.
 2. Qurṭubī, Aḥkām, 2:57.

was very clear in Ṭabarī's mind. Numerous verses of the Qur'ān were held by him to be affirmative, muḥkam,⁽¹⁾ muthbat, ghayr mansūkh, for this one simple reason namely that they belong to statements of informative character. The verse "Lo! hell lurketh in ambush, a home for the rebellious, they will abide therein for ages" (Q.LXXVIII:21-23) is held by some commentators of the Qur'ān to be abrogated by a verse that follows in the same chapter "so taste (of that which ye have earned). No increase do We give you save torment" (Q.LXXVIII:30). Ṭabarī ruled out abrogation in this particular case because the first verse conveys an informative material and hence impossible to abrogate.⁽²⁾

Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī is reported to have denied the coming down of the Table when Jesus Christ requested God to bring it forth. For Ṭabarī, the phrase, "I send it down for you" (Q.V:115) is an informative statement and, therefore, it must be fulfilled. Admitting that it could be otherwise amounts to the same as holding that God does not keep his promise.⁽³⁾

Ṭabarī lived in an age when it was only too easy to say this verse is abrogated, that verse is abrogated. Identifying himself with the group which held abrogation to be an

1. The term "muḥkam" as used in the Qur'ān is the opposite of both mansūkh or abrogated and mutashābih or not distinct. See, for instance, Q.III:7 and Q.XXII:52.
2. Ṭ.T, 30:8.
3. Ibid., 7:82.

article of jurisprudence, sharī'a, or law and not an article of theology, he felt the pressing need of laying down certain rules to govern the application of that judicial activity. Four principles are formulated by him:- (a) Abrogation applies to the sphere of law; informative statements are utterly excluded. (b) The abrogating cancels and hence contradicts⁽¹⁾ the abrogated in every respect. (c) The two verses must necessarily be dealing with the same issue, revealed at different times and having contrasting connotation.⁽²⁾ (d) If two groups of scholars dispute over a verse whether it is abrogated or not, it is more reasonable to back those who deny abrogation. It is absolutely unlawful to hold the view that a verse is abrogated without having indubitable evidence.⁽³⁾

The determination whether or not a verse is abrogated is thus of tremendous importance. This is because it has direct bearing on practical issues of life which is to be designed in accordance with Islamic law. The question of abrogation could,

1. Ibn-Khaldūn accepts this condition for abrogation when he says that if two statements revealed at different times are so uncompromisingly opposing to each other, the latter abrogates the former, Muqaddima, 368. An-Nīsābūrī believes that contradiction is inconceivable in God's book. Abrogation does not belong to this phenomenon because two contradictory statements must essentially be conducted at one and the same time, Raghā'ib, 1:22.
2. T.T, 2:269.
3. Ibid., 2:66; 5:36.

and in fact did, lead to considerable differences among various sects of Islam. Some of the extremists, ghulāt, belonging to the Shī'ite sect used this same principle of abrogation to free themselves from the burden of well-known Islamic prohibitions such as wine, dead animals, pork⁽¹⁾...etc. They argued that the verse, "There shall be no sin (imputed) unto those who believe and do good works for what they may have eaten" (Q.V:93) abrogates "It is forbidden unto you to take for food Carrion, blood, swine-flesh ... etc." (Q.V:3).

Ṭabarī claimed that the first verse quoted by the Shī'ite extremists was revealed when Muslims inquired about the future of those who died before the prohibition of items numerated in the second verse.⁽²⁾ If we follow the assertions of Ṭabarī we will undoubtedly come to the conclusion that the first verse was revealed before the second one and, therefore, it can by no means abrogate it.

From what has been said it would seem clear that Ṭabarī placed himself in direct opposition to the Shī'ite doctrine of al-badā'. He confined the conception of abrogation to the sphere of law. No abrogation is to be admitted if a verse of the Qur'ān proves to be of informative quality. The knowledge

1. Qummī, Maqālāt, 41: Ash'arī, Maqālāt, 1:6.

2. Ṭ.T, 7:22.

possessed by God is not limited by space or time; He equally knows the future and the present. In his approach to the problem of abrogation, Ṭabarī showed himself as a moderate thinker turning away from extremes. He refused to accept the complete denial and negation of the theory of abrogation but at the same time he resented extravagant extensions of its application.

CHAPTER VI

The Doctrines of the Vision of God.

Another problem which we need to investigate in addition to those of the Imamate, Infallibility, Return and abrogation, is that of the vision of God. Like the doctrine of the return, this is a purely theological question. It has more to do with Mu'tazilite theology than with the Shī'ites. Nevertheless the Shī'ites have something to contribute to the problem at hand. Shī'ite writers dwelt upon the question of whether or not God will reveal Himself to his creatures and tried to find out solutions for it. Abū-Muhammad al-Ḥasan ibn-Mūsā an-Nawbakhtī, to whom the book of Firaq ash-Shī'a⁽¹⁾ is attributed and one of the contemporaries of Ṭabarī, discussed the problem from a Shī'ite point of view in an independent work entitled ar-Radd 'alā man qāl bi-r-ru'ya li-l-Bārī' 'azza wa-jalla.⁽²⁾

Although the question whether God is visible or invisible is now out of date having no place except in history, it continued to be a living theological problem for centuries after Ṭabarī.

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1. The authorship of Nawbakhtī is rejected by some scholars, B. Lewis, Ismā'ilism, 14f.
 2. Hibat-Allāh al-Ḥusaynī notes Nawbakhtī, Firaq, yṭ.

Ash-Shawkānī, the author of the celebrated work Nayl al-awṭār, who died as late as 1255 A.H. wrote a book entitled Risālat al-bughya fī masa'lat ar-ru'ya. It is striking that even some modern Shī'ite writers are still engaged with the problem. (1)

It is of real significance for us to examine the position of Ṭabarī on this particular problem. His views will throw much light on whether or not he has inclinations towards Shī'ite teachings. If we succeed in proving the case that Ṭabarī held almost contradicting views to the well-established and well-authorized Shī'ite doctrines, no justification for his Shī'ism seems to exist.

The doctrine of the vision of God has its origin not only in the Qur'ān but also in the traditions of the Prophet. "According to commentators the doctrine itself cannot be doubted, because it is based on the Qur'ān and Sunna. Details, however, are quite uncertain mutashābih; it is accordingly based on Scripture, not on reason - thābit bi-n-naṣṣ lā bi-l-'aql. As the uncertainty concerns the descriptive part of the doctrine only, its integral acceptance is obligatory." (2)

Fakhr ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī maintained that his position as far as ru'ya is concerned was exactly the same as that of Abū-Mansūr al-Māturīdī of Samarqand. For them the ru'ya is based

1. e.g. Khālīṣī, Islām, 7.

2. Wensinck, M. creed, 229.

on the obvious sense of the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth and not on reason. (1) For Ṭaḥāwī the doctrine of the vision of God should be accepted by Muslims without description or comparison. It belongs to the Mutashābih to which we have to submit without seeking any interpretation, tark at-ta'wīl waluzūm at-taslīm. (2) The view of Ṭabarī ran nearly on the same lines. This, however, did not prevent him from seeking rational arguments for the acceptance of the doctrine as we shall see later.

The Sunnites, together with the vast majority of the anthropomorphists held the view that the believers would, beyond doubt, see God in the Hereafter. (3) Some of them such as an-Nawawī, the Shafi'ite scholar well-known for his extensive commentary on the Ṣaḥīḥ of Muslim and his authorship of Tahdhīb al-asmā', took the view that it is even possible to see God in this world, not to mention the world to come. (4) This was obviously to allow for the seeing of God by Prophet Muḥammad on the famous event of the mi'rāj to which we will refer later.

1. Rāzī, Arba'īn, 198.

2. Bayān, 4.

3. For this long controversy see Ṭ.T, 7:183ff; Ash'arī, Maqālāt, 1:213ff where nineteen different points of view are stated; Ibn-Ḥazm, Fisal, 3:2ff; Rāzī, Arba'īn, 187ff.

4. Comm. on Muslim, 2:91 and 2:105.

On the other hand, the Mu'tazilites, the overwhelming majority of Shī'ites and the Khārijites are of the opinion that it is absolutely impossible to see God either in this world or in the world to come. (1) The Shī'ites are greatly influenced by the theological school of the Mu'tazilites. Shahrastānī, for example, informs us that Zayd ibn-'Alī, the head of the Zaydite Shī'ite sub-division, is a disciple of Wāṣil ibn-'Atā'. (2) The close relationship between the two schools of thought could be demonstrated by the fact that they both agreed on important theological ideas. To mention a few examples, they agreed that the attributes of God are not qualities added to His essence; (3) that the Qur'ān is (4) created and that God could not be seen. (5)

The Imāmites unanimously agreed that God could never be seen. The Imām Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādiq is reported to have said that God is too great to be seen by the human eye. Seeing by the

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1. Ash'arī, Maqālāt, 1:216; For some of the Shī'ite arguments against the doctrine see, A.A.A. Fyzee, A Shī'ite creed, 28.
 2. Milal, 1:32.
 3. Macdonald, Development, 159.
 4. Ash'arī, Maqālāt, 2:582; A.A.A. Fyzee, A Shī'ite creed, 85.
 5. A. Amīn, Duḥā, 3:269. Although they agreed on these points, they differed on the question of free will and predestination. The Mu'tazilites held the view of tawfīd. The Shī'ites held an intermediate position between jabr and tawfīd. They related a tradition attributed to Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādiq, lā jabr wa-lā tafwīd wa-lākin amr^{un} bayn amrayn. This also reminds us of the Mu'tazilite principle of al-manzila. Ṭabarī advocated the doctrine of acquisition, Ṭ.T, 9:127; 13:105.

heart is however not impossible. A man stood up and asked 'Alī ibn-Abī-Tālib: O commander of the believers have you seen your Lord?" 'Alī answered: "It is not for me to worship a Lord whom I saw not." The man asked him further: "How did you see HIM? Describe Him for us" 'Alī pointed out then, that it was the heart that saw Him and not the eyes. (1)

All parties, however, looked forward, as they constantly did and not unexpectedly, to the Qur'ān to supply them with the necessary weapons required in defending their various ideas. The following verses of the Qur'ān are usually presented in justification of the theory of the vision of God:

- (I) "They indeed are losers who deny their meeting with God" (Q.VI:31); "But We suffer those who look for the meeting with Us to wander blindly on in their contumacy" (Q.X:12). (2)
- (II) "Those who do good shall receive a most excellent reward, al-ḥusnā, and a superabundant addition, ziyāda. Neither dust nor ignominy cometh near their faces" (Q.X:27).

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1. For this paragraph see, Shabbir, Haqq, 1:51-53. The Mu'tazilites also agreed that God could not be seen by the eyes but they differed as to whether He could be seen by the hearts, Ash'arī, Maqālāt, 1:216.
 2. Every similar verse which deals with the meeting of God with His creatures is drawn as an evidence in this respect. Also there are innumerable traditions ascribed to the Prophet conveying similar meanings, see, for example, T.T, 12:13; 25:86; 29:23; Bukhārī, Ṣaḥīḥ, 3:226; 3:260f.

- (III) "That day with (the believer's) faces be resplendent looking, nāzira, towards their Lord" (Q.LXXV: 22f).
- (IV) "There they have all that they desire, and there is more with Us" (Q.L:35).
- (V) "Nay, but surely on that day they will be covered from their Lord" (Q.LXXXIII: 15).

Four interpretations are presented in Ṭabarī's Tafsīr⁽¹⁾ for (II): (a) The superabundant addition mentioned in the verse is the constant looking at the face of God while al-ḥusnā stands for paradise. (b) al-ḥusnā means for every good work there is an equal reward while the ziyāda is the compound reward for every individual work. This view is held by Ibn-'Abbās and al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. (c) The ziyāda is the pleasure and forgiveness bestowed by God on His honoured creatures. This is the view of Mujāhid Ibn-Jabr, the famous Follower, who is well-known for his rational interpretation of the Qur'ān. He entirely denied the doctrine of the vision of God.⁽²⁾ (d) al-ḥusnā is the paradise where the believers are going to abide in the next world; the ziyāda is

1. 11: 66-69.

2. See, also, Bukhārī, Ṣaḥīḥ, 3:258. Ibn-Ḥazm maintains that an excuse, such as ignorance about the prophetic sayings which gave rise to the doctrine, should be sought for Mujāhid! Fiṣal, 3:2.

what they are granted in this world. Ṭabarī held that all of the four interpretations are possible interpretations enjoying equal merits. The verse, therefore, should not be restricted to any of them. God revealed the verse in such a way that it conveys all these meanings and no one had the right to restrict what is made general by Him. (1)

Verse (III) is the strongest proof that God will be seen in the next world. (2) Constant reference is made to it throughout the chapter on ru'ya by al-Ash'arī in his book entitled al-Luma'. Two ways of interpretation are given by Ṭabarī for the term nāzira: (a) nāzira means looking at God. This view is ascribed to Ibn-'Umar, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and 'Aṭiyya al-'Awfī. (b) nāzira means waiting for the rewards and bounties of God. This is the view of Mujāhid to whom we have referred earlier. For him God will not be seen by His creatures whatever their position might be. All those who rejected the doctrine of the vision of God clung to this interpretation. (3) For Ṭabarī (a) was more likely than (b). This is because (a) is supported by

1. Ghazālī took the ziyāda to mean looking at the face of God. For him this is the greatest pleasure held out for the believers. Any other kind of luxury in paradise is shared by rational and irrational beings, Inyā', 4:465. Rāzī also drew an evidence for the seeing of God from this verse, Arba'in, 210.
2. See, Ṭ.T, 29:103f; Ash'arī, Ibāna, 56-58; Ibn-Qutayba, Ikhtilāf, 32f; Rāzī, Arba'in, 208ff.
3. See, for instance, Zamakhsharī, Kashshāf, 2:509.

the prophetic tradition which maintains that the highest rank of the inhabitants of paradise is that of those who look into the face of God twice a day, both morning and evening.

Al-Qādī 'Abd-al-Jabbār, the famous Mu'tazilite commentator and the author of Tanzīh al-qur'ān, claimed that the word nāzira does not mean looking at their Lord in the sense of (seeing Him) but looking to their Lord (for reward without seeing Him). This verse, he adds, is similar to another verse of the Qur'ān "and ask al-qarya" (Q.12:82). al-qarya here, of course, applies to the inhabitants of the town and not the town itself. (1)

Commentators resorted there and elsewhere to the niceties of the Arabic language in order to find out support for their pre-conceived theological ideas. Al-Ash'arī⁽²⁾ and al-Baghdādī⁽³⁾ argued that the preposition ilā (towards) cannot be used with the verb naẓara when it means (expected). The Sunnites held that God is not speaking in the verse about looking for rewards. He only means the looking which is seeing.

The Mu'tazilites and those who rejected the doctrine answered that the Sunnite argument is sound when we are dealing with persons, i.e. waiting for somebody to come but not when we

1. Jullanārī, I.Q., XII: 92.

2. Ibāna, 57.

3. Uṣūl, 100.

are dealing with notions such as help, reward -- etc. (1) Al-Jubbā'ī, the famous mu'tazilite scholar, even went further. He claimed that ilā is the singular of ālā' or bounties, i.e. the believers are looking forward to possess their Lord's bounties and rewards. (2)

The mazīd mentioned in verse (IV) is interpreted to mean looking at God. Some Commentators added that this will take place on a Friday. (3)

Those who commented on (V) differed (4) among themselves as regards the question (from what are the disbelievers covered?). Those who challenged the doctrine of the vision of God held that the disbelievers are covered from the graces and honour of their Lord. (5) Others claimed that they are covered from the vision or ru'ya of their Lord. Al-Ḥasan al-Baḡrī is reported to have said that when the veil is taken off, the believers will gaze at their Lord every day both in the evening as well as in the morning. Ṭabarī could see no contradiction

1. Nīsābūrī, Raghā'ib, 29:103f.

2. Ibn-Ḥazm, Fīṣal, 3:3.

3. Ṭ.T., 26:97f; Ibn-al-Qayyim, Zād al-ma'ād, 1:98f; 110f.

4. Ṭ.T., 30:55.

5. See, for example, A.A.A. Fyze, A Shī'ite creed, 28.

between these two views. This is so because the disbelievers are covered from both senses, i.e. God's graces and the vision of Him. Elsewhere in his Tafsīr,⁽¹⁾ he argued that since the disbelievers are said to be veiled from their Lord, it follows that the believers should be unveiled from Him. Therefore, to say that the believers would see God is not an absurd claim.

From what has been said, it appears that the holders of the doctrine of the vision of God made every effort to draw evidences from the verses of the Qur'ān. They also quoted several prophetic traditions to prove their case. The following are some, out of many, of the traditions frequently quoted:

- (I) "Some of the Companions asked the Prophet: Shall we see our Lord on the Day of Judgement? The Prophet answered: "Your Lord will be visible to your eyes as the moon is seen in a night of full moon or the sun in a cloudless day".⁽²⁾
- (II) "In paradise of Eden nothing will prevent people from seeing their Lord except the veil of glory on His face."⁽³⁾
- (III) On the day of Resurrection the believer will be so close to His Lord that He touches him (in one way or another) and asks him about his sins. The believer will confess all the sins mentioned by His Lord. The

1. 7:185.

2. T.T, 7:183; Ghazālī, Ihyā', 4:442.

3. Bukhārī, Ṣaḥīḥ, 3:345.

Lord will then say: "I have kept these sins secret during your lifetime and I will abolish them today."⁽¹⁾

The following verses of the Qur'ān are often quoted by those who swept away the notion of the visibility of God:-

(I) "And when ye said: O Moses! We will not believe in thee till we see God plainly: and as a result the lightning seized you" (Q.II:55).

(II) "The people of the Scripture ask of thee thou shouldst cause an (actual) Book to descend upon them from heaven. They asked a greater thing of Moses when they said: show us God plainly. The storm of lightning seized them for their wickedness." (Q.IV:153).

(III) "Vision comprehendeth Hīm not, but He comprehendeth (all) vision. He is the subtle, the Aware" (Q.VI:104).

(IV) "And when Moses came to Our appointment and His Lord had spoken unto him he said: My Lord! Show me (Thyself) that I may gaze upon Thee. He said: Thou wilt not see Me but gaze upon the Mountain! if it stand still in its place, then thou wilt see Me. And when his Lord revealed (His) glory to the mountain He sent it crashing down, and Moses fell down senseless.

1. T.T, 3:92; 12:13; Chazālī, Inyā', 4:443.

And when he woke he said: glory unto Thee! I turn unto Thee repentant, I am the first of believers" (Q.VII:143).

(V) "It was not for any human being that God should speak to him unless (it be) by revelation or from behind a veil or (that) He sendeth a messenger to reveal what He will by His leave Lo! He is Exalted, Wise" (Q.XLII:50).

Verse (III) is really the strongest evidence to which the opponents of vision stick. Ṭabarī differentiated between the two notions:⁽¹⁾ (a) ru'ya or vision and (b) idrāk or comprehension mentioned in the verse. For him the believers would see God in the future. There was no doubt about this in his mind. This is not, however, the same as saying that their eyes or sight would "surround" Him. Being infinite, He would not be "surrounded" by the sight of his creatures. (b) is impossible and indeed unthinkable. Both the Qur'ān and the Sunna deny it. The statement that He will be seen but not "surrounded" by human sight is similar in Ṭabarī's view to the statement that He is known but at the same time He is absolute or unlimited.

Ṭabarī argued that since God told us explicitly that the believers will see Him (Q.LXXV:22f), the verse "Vision comprehendeth (surrounds) Him not ..." (Q.VI:104) should not be taken

1. T.T, 7:183. The same distinction is also drawn by Ibn-Ḥazm, Fīṣal, 3:3 and Rāzī, Arba'īn, 213ff.

in its absolute sense. If it is going to be taken in its absolute sense, an obvious contradiction does occur between the two verses. We know, he added, that the Book of God is consistent. It permits of no contradiction. The two verses in question do belong to the informative⁽¹⁾ type which falls beyond the sphere of abrogation. Therefore, he concludes, the verse: "Vision comprehendeth Him not ..." should be restricted to one of the following four meanings:⁽²⁾

- (a) The disbelievers will neither see Him in this world nor in the world to come but the believers will certainly do so.
- (b) It is possible to see Him but He will by no means be surrounded by the creatures' eyes.
- (c) He will not be seen in this world but He will allow us to see Him in the Hereafter. Shabbir, of the Imāmite sect, argues that there is no proof that this will turn out to be so. For him this is no more than a nonsensical assertion.⁽³⁾
- (d) "Vision Comprehendeth Him not, but He comprehendeth vision" simply means that the eyes of His creatures will not see or

1. See the previous chapter on abrogation where Ṭabarī states that abrogation as far as informative statements are concerned, necessarily implies telling lies.
2. Ṭ.T, 7:185.
3. Haqq, 1:54.

comprehend Him in the same way or in the same standard that He sees or comprehends them.

Some of those who objected to the notion of restriction of the verse to these four meanings held that God will create a sixth sense by which He will be seen.⁽¹⁾ For Ṭabarī, at any rate, this is not a well-defined verse. It does not belong to the type of muhkam. He criticized those who rejected the doctrine of the vision of God because they did not rely upon a well-defined verse of the Qur'ān. Their efforts are directed towards the mutashābih. The verse "That day with (the believers') faces be resplendent looking towards their Lord" (Q.LXXV:22f) is a "well-defined" verse as far as Ṭabarī was concerned. But the problem is: who is to determine which verse is muhkam and which verse is mutashābih? The Mu'tazilites, the Shī'ites and indeed everyone who denies the doctrine will give any of the two verses exactly the opposite description given to them by Ṭabarī and his colleagues.

Again, the two parties, those who taught the doctrine of the vision of God and those who denied it, took different attitudes towards the verse "And when Moses came to Our appointment ... etc." (Q.VII:143). Both parties tried to strengthen their

1. Ṭ.T, 7:185. This view is advocated by Dirār ibn-'Amr and Abū-Yaḥyā Ḥafṣ al-Fard, Shahrastānī, Milal, 1:115; Ibn-Ḥazm says that God will be seen by a power extra than that originally put into the human eye, Fisal, 3:2.

own position and weaken the position of their opponents by clinging to the same verse. Al-Baghdādī, for example, claims that the verse is a clear proof that the ru'ya is possible. (1) "Thou wilt not see Me" means "Thou wilt not see Me in this world"! An-Nawawī believes that the vision of God is even possible in this world. He takes the request of Moses to see Him as evidence for his view. Since Moses, is a Prophet, he, by definition, knows what is possible and what is impossible. He is too wise to present an impossible request. (2) Although Moses is reported in the Qur'ān to have said "My Lord show me (Thy self) that I may gaze upon Thee" (Q.VII:143), Zamakhsharī claims that it was not the desire of Moses to see Him but that of Moses' followers or companions. (3)

This verse dealing with the request of Moses to see his Lord led to the further problem whether Muḥammad saw his Lord on the occasion of the mi'rāj or not. 'Ā'isha, the wife of the Prophet, is reported to have said: "do not believe anyone who tells you that Muḥammad saw his Lord." (4) As-Suddī, the famous Shī'ite commentator to whom we referred before, also

1. Uṣūl, 99.

2. Comm. on Muslim, 2:91.

3. Kashshāf, 1:348f.

4. Ṭ.T, 7:184; 27:27; Bukhārī, ṣaḥīḥ, 3:339f.

denied Muhammad's seeing of God. (1) Ibn-'Abbās the most outstanding mufassir among the Companions of the Prophet, claimed that he did see Him. (2)

The crucial verse (3) in this respect is "The heart lied not (in seeing) what it saw. Will ye then dispute with him concerning what he seeth? And verily he saw him yet another time" (Q.LIII:11-13). The Shī'ites argued that "The heart lied not (in seeing) what it saw" is a clear proof that he did not see Him by his eyes. (4)

Ṭabarī observed that those who denied the doctrine of the vision of God fell into confusion and perplexity. This is because they reduced the matter to their own minds. They are neither dependent upon a well-defined verse of the Qur'ān nor upon a prophetic tradition whether authentic or non-authentic. Some of them explained away the traditions received from the Prophet in connection with the matter; others doubted their very existence. This is why they are baffled and led astray. (5) Nonetheless Ṭabarī was entirely prepared to enter into rational discussions about the concept.

1. T.T, 7:184.

2. Ibid., 27:28.

3. For the various interpretations of the verse see, T.T, 27:24ff.

4. Ibn-Furāt, Tafsīr, 31; Shabbir, Haqq, 1:53.

5. T.T, 7:184 and 186.

The main argument of those who reject the doctrine of the vision of God is that God is not a finite object. He is beyond the limitations of time and space. To see something there must be a distance between the seer and the object seen. Both the Mu'tazilites and the Shī'ites resort to this kind of argument.⁽¹⁾ The advocates of the doctrine claimed that this is not necessarily so. In fact "there will be no distance between Him and his creatures".⁽²⁾

Ṭabarī agreed that God is unlimited. Anthropomorphism was far from his thought. An anthropomorphic interpretation of the word "hand",⁽³⁾ for example, was sometimes explained away by him. When God says: "The Jews say: God's hand is fettered ..." (Q.V:64), the fettering of the hand here stands for the act of being mean. In spite of the fact that Ṭabarī rejected anthropomorphism, he supported the doctrine of the vision of God strongly. He began his argument by putting a question to those who swept away the doctrine. "Have you ever known of a rational being, other than God, who is both separable and inseparable from you?" If they answered affirmatively, they

1. See, for example, Zamakhsharī, Kashshāf, 1:307 and 348;
 ✓ Kāzīmī, Khaṣā'is, 11.

2. Wensinck, M. creed, 193f.

3. Ṭ.T, 6:171. See also Ṭabarī's commentary on, "God will neither speak to them nor look upon them on the Day of Resurrection" (Q.III:77) Ṭ.T, 3:208.

would be bound to show us that being which obviously does not exist. If they answered negatively, which is the proper and expected answer, a further question would be put forward:-

You knew Him as being both separable and inseparable from you, why is this knowledge not impossible? What is the difference between vision and knowledge in God's case? We know Him in spite of the fact that He is unlimited and we will see Him despite His unqualified nature. Similarly those who claimed that all the objects we see are coloured, God is not coloured ∴ God cannot be seen are answered in the same way. (1)

In the foregoing pages we have been trying to follow up Ṭabarī's position on the theological problem of the vision of God. He was mainly dependent on the Qur'ān and the traditions ascribed to the Prophet. In addition he attempted to make some effort to refute the arguments brought forward by the theologians who challenged the doctrine. He did not refrain from using the same methods as the theologians known as the mutakallimūn in order to achieve his objective. Throughout his work he showed himself an opponent to those who rejected the doctrine of the vision of God. Among those he opposed, as we have seen, were the Shī'ite groups of whom he was alleged to be a member.

1. T.T, 7:185f. The same argument is used by Nāṣir ad-Dīn Aḥmad ibn-Muḥammad ibn-Mansūr, a Maliki jurist who died 683 A.H, in his Intisāf printed on the margin of Zamakhsharī, Kashshāf, 1:348.

CHAPTER VIIJudicial Differences

We have seen so far how Ṭabarī broke with the Shī'ites on some important theological issues such as the doctrine of infallibility and that of the return. Now we will set about to examine how near or remote he was from the Shī'ites in the field of jurisprudence. Two points of fiqh are going to be discussed. The first point concerns the social law of Muslims with regard to marriage. The second point deals with a definite aspect of wudū' or corporal ablutions carried out in preparation for prayer. In the first place we are going to deal with a certain type of marriage known as nikāḥ al-mut'a or temporary marriage; in the second place we will tackle the question of al-mash' alā-l-khuffayn or the wiping of the sandals.

Temporary Marriage: (1)

It is a well-known fact that the Qur'ān limits the number of free women who can be taken as legal wives at the same time by

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1. For Temporary Marriage see: Ṭ.T, 5:8-10; Qaṣṭalānī, Irshād, 8:42-44; Nawawī, Comm. on Muslim, 6:118-131; Nisābūrī, Raghā'ib, 5:18ff; Khālīsī, Iḥlām, 249ff; Heffning, mut'a, E.I., III:774-776; M. Jār-Allāh, al-Washī'a, 120ff.

a single man to four.⁽¹⁾ The Shī'ites,⁽²⁾ however, advocated the view that a man is permitted to enter into a state of temporary marriage with an unlimited number of women, free or unfree, Muslim or non-Muslim. There is no divorce in such a marriage. It eventually disappears by the termination of the fixed period. An end, however, may be put to it by mutual agreement. The two parties do not inherit from each other unless it is stated beforehand in the contract.

The Sunnites could hardly see any difference between adultery and the temporary marriage legalized by the Shī'ites. Even Ja'far ibn-Muhammad, the famous Shī'ite imām known as aṣ-Ṣādiq, is represented in their writings as having said that mut'a is equivalent to adultery.⁽³⁾ The Shī'ites distinguished between mut'a and adultery in many ways, e.g. the children of the mut'a relationships are legitimate and are entitled to every right of legitimate children such as maintenance and inheritance.⁽⁴⁾

The Shī'ites distinguished between two kinds of marriage: (a) permanent marriage or al-'aqd ad-dā'im, and (b) temporary marriage or al-'aqd al-munqati'.⁽⁵⁾ For them temporary marriage

1. The only reference to this is to be found in (Q.IV:3).
2. The Twelvers are the real advocates of this view. The Fāṭimids condemn the mut'a, Nu'mān, Da'ā'im, 2:226.
3. See, for instance, Qaṣṭalānī, Irshād, 8:42.
4. Khāliṣī, Islām, 250.
5. Ibid., 236.

is proved both by the Qur'ān and the traditions of the Prophet as related by the various members of the House of the Prophet. Even the Sunnites, as we will see later, admit that temporary marriage was allowed by the Prophet on certain occasions. (1) The difference between the two groups is that the latter claimed that temporary marriage was allowed by the Prophet for a time and was abrogated afterwards; the former denied that it was abrogated.

The Shī'ites claimed that it was 'Umar ibn-al-Khaṭṭāb, and not the Prophet, who abolished the practice of the mut'a. 'Alī ibn-Abī-Ṭālib is reported to have said that had it not been for the work done by 'Umar, namely the prohibition of the mut'a, none except the miserable would have committed adultery, mā zanā illā shaqiyyun. (2)

The crucial verse of the Qur'ān to which the Shī'ites appealed as evidence for the legality of temporary marriage is that of the chapter of the Women which goes as follows: "... Lawful unto you are all beyond those mentioned, so that ye seek with your wealth in honest wedlock, not debauchery. And those of whom ye seek content fa-mā-stamta'tum bi-hi min-hunna (by

1. If we examine the custom of temporary marriage, we find that it was practised in Arabia before the coming of Islam. See Heffning, mut'a, E.I., III: 774.
2. Ṭ.T, 5:9; Nīsābūrī, Raghā'ib, 5:17.

marrying them), give unto them their portions as a duty. And there is no sin for you in what ye do by mutual agreement after the duty hath been done" (Q.IV:24).

Ubayy ibn-Ka'b, Ibn-'Abbās and Sa'īd ibn-Jubayr are reported to have read this verse differently. After the phrase fa-mā-stamta'tum bi-bi min-hunna, they added three other words, namely ilā ajalⁱⁿ musammā (1) i.e. up to a limited period of time. This reading attributed to two or three Companions of the Prophet and a celebrated Follower, is, of course, in complete agreement with the Shī'ite view. It might well be one of their own inventions. Most of the controversy over the issue is due to this verse whose meaning is not clear to many minds. (2)

Ṭabarī attacked the idea of temporary marriage very fiercely. The term "istimtā'" mentioned in the verse meant for him no more than the usual marriage with all its conditions and regulations. He seems to be very much concerned with the issue. In his Tafsīr (3) he disclosed to us that he had stated clearly in his various books that temporary marriage was absolutely prohibited in Islam.

1. Ṭ.T, 5:9. Nawawī attributed the reading to Ibn-Mas'ūd, Comm. on Muslim, 6:118. See, also, Goldziher, Richtungen, 13; A. Jeffery, Materials, 36.
2. Both Ibn-'Abbās and Mujāhid acknowledged ignorance of its meaning, Ṭ.T, 5:5.
3. 5:9.

Ṭabarī maintained that the reading ascribed to Ubayy ibn-Ka'b and others should be rejected vigorously. This reading, he claimed, was totally foreign to Muslim Codices or Maṣāḥif.⁽¹⁾ No-one is permitted to add anything to the Book of God. Thus the reading "ilā ajalⁱⁿ musammā" was denounced by Ṭabarī. He pronounced it as being a peculiar reading, qirā'a shādhda.⁽²⁾

Certain rules were put by Ṭabarī to safeguard against erroneous readings. Among these is the one that a reading should enjoy the general acceptance and recognition of the Muslim community. We have seen how faithful and loyal Ṭabarī was to the general consent and agreement of Muslims when we were discussing the principle of ijmā'. This appears to be exceptionally necessary for the purpose of preserving the Qur'ān from distortion whether by the Shī'ites or otherwise.

Rejecting the Shī'ite reading, Ṭabarī was ready to wage a destructive war against the notion of temporary marriage. Two interpretations are presented by him for the verse in question. The first view was represented in his Tafsīr⁽³⁾ by

1. Ṭabarī thought it necessary to lay down certain rules which should be observed with Qur'ānic readings, e.g. (a) fame and popularity, (b) conformity with Arabic grammatical and linguistic rules, (c) agreement with the script of the Codex or rasm al-maṣḥaf. If he was asked which maṣḥaf should we consider, he would positively refer to rule (a).
2. Peculiar readings have no implications on actual, practical matters. The Ḥanifite school is an exception to this rule, M. Shaltūt, al-Islām, 498.
3. 5:8.

al-Hasan al-Baṣrī and Mujāhid ibn-Jabr. For both of them the istimtā' is equivalent to nikāḥ or marriage. Oddly enough the second view which is presented as an alternative for the first one is again represented by the same Mujāhid ibn-Jabr.

The real representative of the second view, however, is as-Suddī the Elder, the famous Shī'ite commentator whom we have met more than once. As-Suddī claims that the istimtā' means pleasure in its broad sense. For him the verse does not refer to the usual marriage with its witnesses, ⁽¹⁾ dowry, etc. It refers to another kind of marriage where the marital relationship is not so close, vital and permanent. This, he claims, is what we call nikāḥ al-mut'a where no inheritance is established between the two couples. Ṭabarī described the view of as-Suddī as being meaningless. ⁽²⁾

The main argument presented by Ṭabarī against the concept of mut'a is that sexual intercourse between men and women is only allowed in two cases (a) legal marriage, and (b) the possession of the right hand or women captives of war. This argument is criticized by some Muslim scholars as we will see later.

In defending the idea of nikāḥ al-mut'a, the Shī'ites

1. Under the Shī'a law "the presence of witnesses is not necessary in any matter regarding marriage", Ameer 'Alī, Muḥammadan law, 102.
2. Ṭ.T, 5:10.

mentioned another verse from the same chapter of the Women. This is "God would make the burden light for you, for man is created weak" (Q.IV:28). The Shī'ites argued that this lightening of the human burden is the permissibility of nikāh al-mut'a.⁽¹⁾ Some of the Shī'ite extreme sects, namely al-Khaṭṭābiyya, followers of Abū-l-Khaṭṭāb of the tribe of Asad (d. 138 A.H.), used the same verse to escape any kind of religious obligation or duty such as prayer, fasting, etc.⁽²⁾ For Ṭabarī the verse had nothing to do with nikāh al-mut'a. The extremist's view does not, of course, deserve any discussion or consideration. The meaning of the verse in Ṭabarī's mind was as clear as it could be. It only asserts that those who cannot afford to marry free women are allowed to marry non-free ones.⁽³⁾ The verse, therefore, should be looked at in the light of the foregoing verses, namely "And whoso is not able to afford to marry free believing women, let them marry from the believing maids whom your right hands possess etc." (Q.IV:25).

In addition to the Qur'ān, the Shī'ites resorted to their own peculiar traditions attributed to the Prophet and their

1. Goldziher, Vorlesungen, 238.

2. Qumī, Maqālāt, 63; Nawbakhtī, Firaq, 38.

3. Ṭ.T, 5:18f.

infallible imams. For them the sunna of the Prophet did encourage Muslims to adopt the phenomenon of nikāḥ al-mut'a. "When a man washes himself after having sexual intercourse as a result of temporary marriage, every drop of water used removes a sin committed by him".⁽¹⁾ "God prohibited wine but instead He permitted temporary marriage".⁽²⁾

Great importance is attached to the question of temporary marriage by the Shī'ites. One of their imams, probably Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādiq, mentioned the doctrine of the return side by side with that of mut'a. He is reported to have said "whoever questions the doctrine of the return and disapproves of temporary marriage is not to be associated with us".⁽³⁾ The Shī'ites thus viewed the question of temporary marriage not only as a minor issue of judicial difference with the Sunnites but as a question of primary importance and far-reaching consequences.⁽⁴⁾ It is, in short, one of the pillars of their school of law.

Al-Baghdādī⁽⁵⁾ and Ibn-Baṭṭa⁽⁶⁾ made it clear that the

1. Khāliṣī, Islām, 252.

2. Ibid., 252.

3. Shabbir, Ḥaqq, 2:4; Kāzimī, Khaṣā'iṣ, 502; Mashkūr, Comm. Qummī maq., 187; M. Jār-Allāh, Washī'a, 125.

4. "The Imāmites even go so far as to say: The believer is only perfect when he has experienced mut'a", Heffning, mut'a, E.I., III:775.

5. Farq, 314.

6. Uṣūl as-sunna, 74.

prohibition of nikāḥ al-mut'a is one of the fundamental points upon which the Sunnites agreed. All Muslim scholars seem to agree that it was allowed by the Prophet in the early days of Islām. Ibn-Mas'ūd tells us that they used to accompany the Prophet in his wars when he permitted them to contract marriages for a limited period of time. It is significant that Ibn-Mas'ūd mentions no abrogation.⁽¹⁾ An-Nīsābūrī⁽²⁾ set forth to prove that temporary marriage was approved by the Prophet for a time.

Ṭabarī, together with Sunnite scholars, claimed that the mut'a was abrogated during the lifetime of the Prophet.⁽³⁾ The Shī'ites admit of no abrogation. 'Imrān ibn-Ḥaṣīn, one of the Companions of the Prophet, is represented to have said: "The permission of nikāḥ al-mut'a is revealed in the Qur'ān. No verse has been revealed afterwards to abrogate it. The Prophet encouraged us to perform it. He never asked us to refrain from it until he died. Then a man, obviously referring to 'Umar ibn-al-Khaṭṭāb, came and prevented people from practising it, relying on no authority except his own personal view!"⁽⁴⁾

1. Shāfi'ī, Umm, 7:161.

2. Raghā'ib, 5:18ff; see, also, Qaṣṭalānī, Irshād, 8:44; Nawawī, Comm. on Muslim, 6:118.

3. Ṭ.T, 5:9.

4. Nīsābūrī, Raghā'ib, 5:17.

Although the Sunnites agreed unanimously on the question of the prohibition of mut'a, they differed greatly as to when was it allowed and when was it prohibited. The campaigns of Khaybar, Mecca and Tabūk are all mentioned in this respect. (1) On one of these occasions the Prophet is reported to have said: "In the past I gave you permission to conduct temporary marriages; God prohibits this kind of marriage from now onwards. Whoever happens to have temporary wives should release them without making any deduction from the sum he gave over to them". (2)

The Sunnites also based their argument on the Qur'an and the traditions received from the Prophet. It is related that al-Mā'mūn, son of Hārūn ar-Rashīd, was about to proclaim the legality of temporary marriage but Yaḥyā ibn-Aktham, the Chief Judge at the time, convinced him by narrating traditions from the Prophet, on the authority of Ibn-Shihāb az-Zuhrī, demonstrating the illegality of mut'a. (3)

The verse: "And those who preserve their chastity: save with their wives and those whom their right hands possess, for thus they are not blameworthy; But whoso seeketh more than that,

1. To remove the discrepancy found in these narrations, some scholars claimed that both the permission and the prohibition were repeated several times on several occasions, Nawawī, Comm. on Muslim, 6:121; Nīsābūrī, Raghā'ib, 5:18f.
2. Nawawī, Comm. on Muslim, 6:127.
3. Khāliṣī, Islām, 255; A. Amīn, Ḍuḥā, 3:136.

those are they who are transgressors" (Q.LXX:29-31) is used by ash-Shāfi'ī⁽¹⁾ as evidence for the prohibition of nikāḥ al-mut'a. Tabarī, who formerly belonged to the school of ash-Shāfi'ī, used the same verse to serve the same purpose.⁽²⁾ Al-Khayyāt, of the Mu'tazilite school, held the same verse in refutation of the Rawāfiḍ whom he attacked severely for their approval of mut'a.⁽³⁾ Zamakhsharī remarks, and rightly, that such an inference is a weak one.⁽⁴⁾ This is because those who acknowledge the lawfulness of mut'a consider men and women brought into it as legal husbands and wives. In other words, they are not included in the category of the transgressors mentioned in the verse.

In addition to the Qur'ān and the traditions of the Prophet, the Sunnites depended on the interpretation of some of the Companions to these two sources. Tabarī, for instance, in his argument against the idea of temporary marriage, appealed to the authority of a Companion of the Prophet, namely Sabra al-Juhanī, to strengthen his position. Sabra reported that the Prophet instructed them to seek content of women, istamta'ū min hādhihi-n-nisā'. Sabra went on to say that at the time the

1. Muzanī on the margin of Shāfi'ī, Umm, 7:256.
2. T.T, 5:10.
3. Intiṣār, 68. The Mu'tazilites regard nikāḥ al-mut'a as an immoral practice, R. Roberts, The Social law of the Qur'ān, 7. They even do not recognize the lawfulness of polygamy, Ameer 'Alī, Muḥammadan law, 100.
4. Kashshāf, 2:69.

term "istimtā'" meant for us no less than marriage in its appropriate sense. (1)

It seems clear that the Sunnites, including Ṭabarī, disapproved of temporary marriage. We have seen how Shāfi'ī rejected it. He even maintained the view that whoever practices mut'a after knowledge of its prohibition, should be stoned. (2) His disciple as-Suyūṭī says: "Marriage when treated as a contract is a permanent relationship based on mutual consent on the part of a man and a woman between whom there is no bar to a lawful union". (3) For the followers of Mālik "a marriage which is contracted for a certain time only, mut'a, shall be annulled by judicial decree, whether cohabitation has taken place or not. No repudiation is necessary. The marriage is void." (4) Zufar ibn-al-Hudhayl, one of the disciples of Abū-Ḥanīfa, had a slightly different view from that of Mālik and other Muslim scholars. He undoubtedly recognized the illegality of temporary marriage but he held that whenever temporary marriage came into existence, it should be changed into a permanent legal marriage instead of being dissolved. (5)

1. Ṭ.T, 5:9.
2. Umm, 7:219.
3. Quoted by Ameer 'Alī, Muḥammadan law, 97.
4. F.H. Ruxton, Mālikī law, 96.
5. Nawawī, Comm. on Muslim, 6:122; Heffning, Mut'a, E.I., III:775.

One point remains to be discussed and that is the question of marital relationships, whether temporary or permanent, with non-Muslims. Islam distinguishes between two classes of non-Muslims: (a) idolaters and (b) ahl-al-kitāb or people of the Book. Both the Sunnites and the Shī'ites are in agreement as far as (a) is concerned. The Qur'ān is clear on the point that no marital relationships should be formed with them. "Wed not idolatresses till they believe; for lo! a believing bondwoman is better than an idolatress though she please you; and give not your daughters in marriage to idolaters till they believe, for lo! a believing slave is better than an idolater though he please you" (Q.II:221).⁽¹⁾

The Sunnites and some of the Shī'ites adopted two conflicting attitudes towards (b). The verse: "This day are (all) good things made lawful for you. The food of those who received the Scripture is lawful for you, and your food is lawful for them. And so are the virtuous women of the believers and the virtuous women of those who received the Scripture before you (lawful for you) when ye give them their marriage portions and live with them in honour, not in fornication nor taking them as secret concubines" (Q.V:5) was taken by Ṭabarī

1. Zamakhsharī related that Ibn-'Umar refused to accept inter-marriages with ahl-al-kitāb depending on this verse, Kashshāf, 1:247. The verse, however, has nothing to do with them, see Ṭ.T, 2:212f.

and the Sunnites in its broadest sense. The verse is an obvious indication that legal marriages could be established with ahl-al-kitāb. Ṭabarī could not agree with the view, assigned wrongly in his opinion to 'Umar ibn-al-Khaṭṭāb, that a Muslim cannot get married to a Christian or a Jewish woman. He added that such a claim is against the opinion of the overwhelming majority of Muslims and this opinion is supported both by the Qur'ān and the traditions of the Prophet.⁽¹⁾

The Shī'ites adopted the most intolerant attitude in this respect. They would even be reluctant to eat any food prepared by a Christian or a Jew.⁽²⁾ They claimed that the previous mentioned verse (Q.V:5) has been abrogated by another verse,⁽³⁾ namely "O ye who believe! when believing women come unto you as fugitives, examine them. God is best aware of their belief. Then, if ye know them for true believers, send them not back unto the unbelievers, nor are the unbelievers lawful for them. And give the unbelievers that which they have spent (upon them). And it is no sin for you to marry when ye have given them their due. And hold not to the ties the unbelieving women" (Q.LX:10).

1. Ṭ.T, 2:212f.

2. Goldziher, Vorlesungen, 245f.

3. A. Amīn, Duḥā, 3:260.

The commandment "wa-lā tumsikū bi-‘īsam al-kawāfir" is taken by the Shī‘ites as evidence that it is not legal to establish marriages with Christians or Jews. The verse, however, is a clear reference to the Arab Pagans. Ṭabarī pointed out that the word "Kawāfir" is the plural of the word "kāfira". He added that the verse prohibits marriages with the idolatresses (1) i.e. he treated it in the same way as he did when commenting on "Wed not idolatresses..." (Q.II:221). Some of the Akhbāriyyūn, to whom we referred when we were dealing with the principle of analogy and its relevance to the doctrine of infallibility, think that only a temporary marriage, mut‘a, can be contracted with a Scripturalist woman. (2)

To bring this discussion to a conclusion, we can say that Ṭabarī was strongly opposed to temporary marriage in spite of its prominence in Shī‘ite law. Again, we noticed that he was far more tolerant than the Shī‘ites on the question of marriages with ahl-al-kitāb.

A ritual difference:

Another striking difference between the Sunnites and the Shī‘ites is in respect of part of the ablution, wuḍu’, namely

1. T.T, 28:44.

2. Ameer ‘Alī, Muḥammadan law, 101.

whether to wash or merely to wipe up the feet. Here we have to differentiate between two conditions: (a) when the feet are covered, i.e. when one wears, for example, shoes or sandals and (b) when the feet are bare, uncovered or exposed. In the first case what is technically known as al-mash 'alā-l-khuffayn,⁽¹⁾ is sufficient for the Sunnites under certain conditions.

Minor as was this question, it developed into a real serious issue of controversy among the various sects of Islam. We have seen, at the beginning of this thesis, how a Shī'ite author devoted an independent monograph to the affair.⁽²⁾ Long chapters are written in various books dealing with fiqh. It is not only mentioned in books dealing with what we call furū' or branches of religion; it is mentioned in books of usūl or roots of religion.

All the Sunnites seem to agree that it is lawful to wipe the sandals in preparation for prayer. A Muslim is permitted to practice al-mash 'alā-l-khyffayn both at home and abroad. For Abū-Ḥanīfa and his followers the moistening of shoes is obligatory for those who are at home during a day and a night,

1. For this see, Ṭ.T, 6:71ff; Nīsābūrī, Raghā'ib, 6:67ff; Shawkānī, Nayl al-awtār, 1:176ff; Ibn-Qudāma, al-Mughnī, 1:281ff; Nu'mān, Da'ā'im, 1:131ff.
2. Reference to Muḥammad ibn-Jarīr ibn-Rustum at-Ṭabarī. His work is entitled Khudhu-n-na'l or "pluck off thy shoes".

for travellers three days and nights. This is founded on a tradition in this sense. Whoever rejects this would be in danger of being accused of disbelief, since this tradition is nearly equivalent to an absolutely reliable report.⁽¹⁾

For Mālik there was no question about the legality of al-mash. He, however, rejected the limit of time.⁽²⁾ Some Muslim jurists maintained that whoever should be at home, would not have the right to wipe the sandals. Ash-Shāfi'ī⁽³⁾ challenged this view holding that the wiping is permissible in all conditions.

Aḥmad ibn-Ḥanbal is reported to have said that he had no doubt whatsoever that a Muslim is allowed to wipe his sandals. This is because, he maintains, more than forty authentic traditions are received from the Prophet in this respect.⁽⁴⁾ Al-Ash'arī says: "We believe that the wiping of the sandals is a sunna at home and during travel contrary to the belief of anyone who denies it".⁽⁵⁾ Ṭaḥāwī in his short treatise entitled Bayān as-sunna wa-l-jamā'a⁽⁶⁾ said almost the same thing.

1. Wensinck, M. creed, 129.

2. Ibn-Qudāma, al-Mughnī, 1:286; Wensinck, M. creed, 158

3. Umm, 1.28.

4. Ibn-Qudāma, al-Mughnī, 1:281.

5. Ibāna, 54.

6. 9.

He held this view because of the traditions reported from the Prophet. Al-Baghdādī⁽¹⁾ and Ibn-Baṭṭa⁽²⁾ enumerate the wiping of the sandals among the profound doctrines which separate the Sunnites from others.

Ṭabarī's position is exactly the same as that of the Sunnites as far as al-mash 'alā-l-khuffayn is concerned. He, however, expressed a slightly different view, as we will see later, from that of the great masses of the Sunnites when it comes to (b), i.e. when the feet are left uncovered.⁽³⁾

"The Shī'a and the Khārijites rejected the wiping of the sandals as a substitute for the washing of the feet. God ordered that the feet should be washed, no mention being made of sandals".⁽⁴⁾ The fact that both of these groups rejected the wiping of the sandals is beyond doubt.⁽⁵⁾ The Khārijites are, of course, out of our concern. What we are interested in are the views of the Shī'ites to whom Ṭabarī was alleged to belong. The word "washing" in Wensinck's text is certainly not exact as far as the Shī'ites are concerned.

1. Farq, 314.

2. Uṣūl as-sunna, 69.

3. T.T., 6:71-77.

4. Wensinck, M. creed, 158.

5. See, for example, Ash'arī, Maqālāt, 2:470; Nīsābūrī, Raghā'ib, 6:67; Shawkānī, Nayl al-awṭār, 176.

It is true that they, with the exception of the Butriyya, ⁽¹⁾ followers of al-Ḥasan ibn-Ṣāliḥ ibn-Ḥayy and others, held that no-one is allowed to wipe the feet when they are covered. But when the feet are bare, it is necessary to wipe, and not to wash, them. ⁽²⁾

The Shī'ites are not prepared to make any sort of compromise with regard to the question of wiping the sandals. It is strictly forbidden to wipe them. The sandals should be put off and then the feet should be rubbed gently. The feet should not be covered except for a vital necessity ⁽³⁾ or a taqiyya, ⁽⁴⁾ i.e. when one finds it necessary to hide his true convictions. Even in this case the ablution or the whole process of purification must be repeated as soon as the necessity is over and fear no longer exists.

A lot of controversy over the issue is due to variation in reading, and hence interpretation, of the verse in the chapter of "The table spread". The verse runs as follows:

1. Qummī, Maqālāt, 11; Nawbakhtī, Firaq, 12.
2. Khāliṣī, Ḥya', 1:132.
3. Nu'mān, Da'a'im, 1:133f.
4. Mashkūr, Comm. Qummī maq., 148. The taqiyya is an important principle of the Shī'a, Goldziher, Vorlesungen, 214f. One of their imams mentions it side by side with prayer and patience, Ibn-Furāt, Tafsīr, 138. The Najadāt of the Khārijites advocated the taqiyya while the Sulaymāniyya of the Zaydites rejected it, Shahrastānī, Milal, 1:167; Qummī, Maqālāt, 78f. Unlike the Shī'ites, Ṭabarī claims that the application of taqiyya should be restricted to the unbelievers. Among Muslims no taqiyya should be adhered to, Ṭ.T, 3:141.

"O ye who believe! when ye rise up for prayer, wash your faces, and your hands up to the elbows, and lightly rub your heads and (wash/or rub) your feet up to the ankles" (Q.V:6).

Three variant readings are offered for the words "your feet". The meaning of the verse changes accordingly. (a) is the reading of the vast majority of the Sunnites. According to this reading, the words "your feet" should come immediately after the words "wash your faces, and your hands up to the elbows". Thus it is necessary to wash the feet when they are bare; there is no other way of dealing with them. It is even related that some Muslims used to read the verse as follows: "aghsilū aydiyakum wa-arjulakum"⁽¹⁾ i.e. wash your hands and your feet. Had the verse been revealed in that manner, no controversy would have arisen.

(b) "arjulikum" is essentially the reading of the Shī'ites.⁽²⁾ Nevertheless it is recognized in one of the seven sets of readings. It is the reading attributed to ahl-al-bayt and some of the 'āmma, common people, presumably the Sunnites.⁽³⁾ Ṭabarī held that both (a) and (b) are satisfactory ways of reading the verse. Arguing from a linguistic point of view, he

1. Sufyān ath-Thawrī, Tafsīr, 58.

2. Nu'mān, Da'ā'im, 1:131; Goldziher, Richtungen, 7f.

3. Nu'mān, Da'ā'im, 1:131.

even preferred (b) to (a).⁽¹⁾ He clearly stated that it makes no difference whether to wash or rub the feet. For him the word "mash" covers both senses, washing and rubbing.

The view expressed by Ṭabarī is also said to be maintained by al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and al-Jubbā'ī of the Mu'tazilite school. Ṭabarī became well-known for holding this view. Many of the later jurists mention him whenever the matter is discussed.⁽²⁾

Some of the Sunnites acknowledge the authenticity of (b), i.e. "arjulikum" but they claimed that what is really meant by it is al-mash 'alā-l-khuffayn and not rubbing the bare feet as the Shī'ites claimed.⁽³⁾ The Shī'ites claimed that even the first reading "arjulakum" is no proof that the feet should be washed. This is because, they argue, the preposition bi in the verse is an additional or otiose particle which can well be omitted. After the omission of the preposition the verse will be "wa-mṣahū ru'ūsakum wa-arjulakum" i.e. rub your heads and your feet.⁽⁴⁾ Ṭahāwī and Ibn-Ḥazm adhered to the principle of abrogation to get rid of the rubbing of the feet in which Ṭabarī found no harm.⁽⁵⁾

1. Ṭ.T, 6:74.

2. e.g. Ad-Dimashqī, Ikhtilāf al-a'imma, 1:18; ash-Sha'rānī, al-Mizān, 1:128; Ibn-Qudama, Mughnī, 1:133; Nisābūrī, Raghā'ib, 6:68; Shawkānī, Nayl al-awṭār, 1:178.

3. Ibid., 1:178.

4. Shawkānī, Nayl al-awṭār, 1:167.

5. Ibid., 1:168.

The last reading "arjulukum" is attributed to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. (1) This reading is in complete accordance with the view of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, Ṭabarī and al-Jubbā'ī to which we referred before.

It seems evident that the verse of "the Table spread" is the backbone of the dispute over this ritual matter. Some of the Shī'ites claimed that this verse abrogates the practice of the wiping of the sandals. "Ḥusayn ibn-'Alī is represented as having said that he never saw the Prophet practicing the minor rite after the revelation of sūra (V:6); hence arose the proud claim that the children of Fāṭima do not wipe their sandals or their headgear". (2) The man who reported the tradition of al-mash 'alā-l-khuffayn is said to have adopted the religion of Islam after the revelation of sūra (V:6!) (3) This seems to be deliberately invented to answer the claim of the Shī'ites that the practice of wiping the sandals is abrogated by (Q.V:6).

Many of the Sunnites are very strict in their handling of the problem. The rubbing of the bare feet is absolutely unlawful. 'Ā'isha, the wife of the Prophet, is thus reported to have

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1. Zamakhsharī, Kashshāf, 1:249.
 2. Wensinck, M. creed, 158.
 3. Shawkānī, Nayl al-awṭār, 1:176.

said that she would rather have her feet cut off than to wipe them without being covered by the sandals. ⁽¹⁾ The fact that Ṭabarī took a more lenient attitude towards the problem upset many of them especially the Ḥanbalites. Ibn-al-Jawzī ⁽²⁾ tells us in a valuable text that Ṭabarī's view, that it is all the same to wash or rub the feet during ablution, contributed greatly to his being accused of Shī'ism. His considering that the rubbing of the bare feet is lawful and correct does not demonstrate his Shī'ite tendency, for he also recognizes the lawfulness of their washing which is strongly rejected by the Shī'ites. Moreover, and indeed more important, he sincerely believed that the wiping of the sandals was a practice of the Prophet. This is certainly against the opinion of the majority of the Shī'ites who abolished the practice by law when they occupied Ṭabaristān in 899. ⁽³⁾

In holding the view that it is permissible to rub the bare feet, Ṭabarī was not following the Shī'ite view blindly. He was relying on the obvious sense of the verse (Q.V:6).

'Abd-Allāh ibn-Muḥammad ibn-Qudāma (d. 620 A.H.), the author of al-Mughnī, one of the main sources of Ḥanbalite law, tells

1. Zamakhsharī, Kashshāf, 1:249.

2. Muntaẓam, 6:172.

3. Goldziher, Vorlesungen, 237.

us that Ṭabarī was also depending on a tradition received from the Prophet. Aws ibn-Abī-Aws ath-Thaqafī related that he saw the Prophet performing his ablution when he rubbed his feet. This, we are told, was Ṭabarī's evidence for his view.⁽¹⁾

1. Mughnī, 1:133.

Conclusion

The sole objective of this thesis is to examine the association of Muḥammad ibn-Jarīr aṭ-Ṭabarī (d. 310 A.H.) with the Shī'ite movement. Remarks have been made in various references which deal with the life of Ṭabarī that he was accused of belonging to the Shī'ite group. Some of those engaged in this question went as far as holding Ṭabarī responsible for fabrication of Prophetic traditions to serve the cause of the Rāfidites, a name sometimes given to qualify the Shī'ites in general.

During the course of this work we have tried to find out evidences which stand for or against Ṭabarī's inclinations towards Shī'ism. To do so we have found ourselves obliged to go into the life of Ṭabarī and to collect information about him from different sources. Some notes are given about prominent masters under whom he studied. We have found that some of his teachers met the same fate of being accused of heterodoxy. The best example of these is, of course, Muḥammad ibn-Ḥumayd ar-Rāzī who communicated to Ṭabarī a great deal of information which bore their obvious Shī'ite marks with them. The majority of Ṭabarī's teachers, however, seem to belong to the Sunnite group. They are widely accepted by traditionists

as trustworthy and many of them are masters of famous men of Ḥadīth such as Bukhārī and Muslim.

The source of the charges against Ṭabarī accusing him of Shī'ism is difficult to find and to identify. Charging with heretical tendencies was a normal practice at the time. Many historians such as Muḥammad ibn-Ishāq and Muḥammad ibn-'Umar al-Wāqidī were accused of heresy and some of them suffered greatly as a result. Traditionists such as ad-Dāraquṭnī and al-Ḥākim were confronted with the same situation. Theologians and jurists such as al-Māwardī and ar-Rāzī, both of the Shāfi'ite school, were held guilty of heterodoxy. Some of these accusations, as we have seen in the case of ad-Dāraquṭnī, could not survive criticism.

The study of the life of Ṭabarī also provided us with the golden opportunity of bringing into the picture some of his influential enemies. The part played by these enemies in the problems faced by Ṭabarī could hardly be overestimated. Their participation in his being accused of Shī'ism seems to be beyond doubt. Two main sections of Ṭabarī's enemies are mentioned: (a) The Ḥanbalites whose conflicts with Ṭabarī are marked with harshness and severity. Even during the last days of his life Ṭabarī found it necessary to make some effort to convince them of his views. Abū-Bakr ibn-Abī-Dā'ūd ibn-al-Ash'ath as-Sijistānī had some academic rivalry with Ṭabarī.

He appealed to the authority of Naṣr al-Ḥājib to prevent Ṭabarī from preaching his heretical views. (b) Ṭabarī was also brought into conflict with the school of the Zāhirites. This conflict is represented by two men, namely 'Alī ibn-Dā'ūd al-Aṣfahānī, the founder of the school, and his son Abū-Bakr Muḥammad ibn-'Alī.

Another factor which might have contributed indirectly to Ṭabarī being accused of Shī'ism is a confusion of names. The main figure in this confusion is Abū-Ja'far Muḥammad ibn-Jarīr ibn-Rustum aṭ-Ṭabarī, a Shī'ite of the same generation as Abū-Ja'far Muḥammad ibn-Jarīr ibn-Kathīr aṭ-Ṭabarī with whom we are concerned. Abū-Ja'far Muḥammad ibn-Jarīr ibn-Rustum aṭ-Ṭabarī wrote a book entitled al-Mustarshid dealing with the crucial issue of the imamate. This book, Aghā Buzurg⁽¹⁾ aṭ-Ṭahrānī comments, is wrongly attributed by Ibn-an-Nadīm in his Fihrist to Abu-Ja'far Muḥammad ibn-Jarīr ibn-Kathīr aṭ-Ṭabarī of the 'amma, the common people, presumably the Sunnites.

Shams ad-Dīn adh-Dhahabī defended Ṭabarī's position in his Mizān al-i'tidāl maintaining that the man who used to invent traditions and assign them to the Prophet is Abū-Ja'far Muḥammad ibn-Jarīr ibn-Rustum aṭ-Ṭabarī and not Abū-Ja'far Muḥammad ibn-Jarīr aṭ-Ṭabarī, the Historian and the Commentator

1. Muṣaffā-l-maqāl, 397f.

on the Qur'ān. The Shī'ites themselves such as aṭ-Ṭūsī in his Fihrist, Kāshānī in Nadd al-Īdāh, at-Ṭahrānī in Muṣaffā-l-maqāl and the author of A'yān ash-Shī'a all pointed out that a distinction should be drawn between aṭ-Ṭabarī of the 'amma and aṭ-Ṭabarī of the Shī'a.

Having finished with these points we went on to examine Ṭabarī's own views. His extensive Tafsīr was, of course, our main source in this respect. We began with examining his stand on certain important theological questions and ended with clarifying his situation on two judicial issues. The first question we dealt with was that of the Imamate. The core of difference between the Sunnites and the Shī'ites lies in the problem of the Imamate. All of the Shī'ites agree that the most suitable man for the office of the Caliphate is 'Alī ibn-Abī-Ṭālib.⁽¹⁾ Ṭabarī challenged this view vigorously. He assimilated himself without reservation with the Sunnite view on the Imamate.

The first four Caliphs of Islam are all recognized and admired by Ṭabarī. Moreover, in his ṣarīḥ as-sunna he states clearly that the merits of these Caliphs correspond to the chronological order of their reigns. Abū-Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthmān are all, therefore, better than 'Alī.⁽²⁾ Ṭabarī is

1. Even the Zaydites who acknowledge the Caliphates of Abū-Bakr and 'Umar regard both of them as inferior to 'Alī,
W.M. Watt, Rāfidites, 117f.

2. R.E.I., XXXVI: 197.

not prepared to speak against any one of the Companions of the Prophet, not to mention the first three Caliphs. The prevention of his native citizens from the habit of cursing the first two Caliphs was one of his longings although all his efforts were frustrated in that direction.

We have seen how Ṭabarī defended the tradition of ghadīr Khumm against its critics such as Abū-Bakr ibn-Abī-Dā'ūd, his famous rival. This is the tradition upon which the Shī'ites based their claim that 'Alī ibn-Abī-Ṭālib was the legal successor of the Prophet. Although he accepted the tradition as authentic, he was not ready to follow the interpretation given to it by the Shī'ites. In his Tafsīr he put the denial of an-naṣṣ or 'designation' into the mouth of 'Alī ibn-Abī-Ṭālib himself. However, the very fact that he accepted the ghadīr tradition seems to provide his enemies with a dangerous and effective weapon. We have seen how the Shī'ites were delighted to have among the transmitters of that tradition a reliable authority such as Ṭabarī.

Two points which act as supplementary to the question of the Imamate are also discussed. These are the doctrine of the Infallibility, 'iṣma, and that of the Return, raj'a. The Shī'ites hold the view that the Prophets are absolutely infallible. They are not liable to sin, whether grave or small. No mistake whatsoever can be made by them. Their memories never fail them.

The doctrine of the infallibility of the prophets was taught by the Shī'ites to serve as a gate leading to the infallibility of their own imams. The preservation of the Islamic law entirely depends on the imams. If we deny them the quality of being infallible, everything is lost. No truthful knowledge will ever be attained. To be an imām necessarily implies infallibility.

The masses of the people are all too ignorant to know whether a man is infallible or not. For this reason they are deprived of the right to choose the imams. The office of the imamate is passed from one imām to another through appointment and not through the election and the desire of the people. The authority which determines who is to be an imām is God himself because He alone knows who is endowed with the privilege of the infallibility. The Prophet, therefore, was instructed by God to choose 'Alī for the leadership of the community after him. No interference by the people was allowed. Ṭabarī refuted all these claims.

The infallibility of the Prophets, not to mention the imams, was denied by Ṭabarī. None of them was protected from sin, grave or small. Their memories prove to be defective on several occasions. Ṭabarī proves his case by a number of quotations from the Qur'ān. Many of these quotations are stated when we were discussing the doctrine of the infallibility which found no sympathy from Ṭabarī's side. The relation of the

principle of consensus and that of analogy to the doctrine of infallibility is also discussed. The Shī'ites have no belief in the principle of consensus as a means to religious knowledge if it is taken to be the agreement of Muslim scholars on certain issues. The consent of the learned people does not mean anything to them if it is separated from the consent of the infallible imām. In fact the Shī'ites presented the doctrine of the infallibility as a substitute for the principle of consensus, ijmā'. We have seen how Ṭabarī elaborated his unconditional faith in the principle of the ijmā'.

The Imāmites divided into two groups as far as the principle of analogy, qiyās, is concerned. The Akhbāriyyūn rejected the principle and its application altogether. They proved to be more faithful to the doctrine of the infallibility than the Uṣūliyyūn who recognized the principle of analogy as a way to religious knowledge. If the doctrine of infallibility is taken to its logical consequences it will ultimately lead to imitation and abandonment of reasoning. Both the doctrine of the infallibility and its consequences are strongly and sharply condemned by Ṭabarī.

The Shī'ites, specially the Twelvers, maintained that their imams will come to this world before the day of Judgement. They made every possible effort to find a justification for this peculiar view from the Qur'ān. Those who enjoy absolute belief together with those who have no faith at all will be raised from

their graves before Resurrection. Both parties will eventually fight each other and the believers will overwhelm their enemies. After the tremendous victory of the believers all will die again and remain in their graves until the Hour comes. For Ṭabarī this was an altogether too ridiculous a doctrine to be held by sensible and thinking beings whether they were believers or unbelievers. The verses taken by the Shī'ites as evidences for their doctrine are all interpreted in a different way by Ṭabarī. The return of the Mahdī, Sufyānī and Jesus Christ are also referred to but the true difference between the Shī'ites and the Sunnites does not concern these figures. The real controversy lies in the possibility and justifiability of the doctrine of the return as described by the Shī'ite theologians.

In addition to the doctrines of the imamate, infallibility and return Ṭabarī found himself in disagreement with the Shī'ites on two other doctrines. These were the doctrine of abrogation and that of the vision of God. The Rāfiqites advocated the view that abrogation is not confined to the sphere of law. It should be extended to the domain of theology. Legislative as well as informative statements are liable to abrogation. This in its turn led them to elaborate the doctrine known as the doctrine of al-bidā'. Al-bidā' can be defined as the process of change in the decrees of God whose knowledge is not something unlimited. The future is not known to Him.

Ṭabarī, as we have seen, strongly maintained that abrogation should be restricted to the field of law. The abrogation of informative statements meant for him indulgence in absurd lies. Law is the only field where the principle of abrogation can function. Since the knowledge of God comprises the past, present and future, the idea of changing His mind is inconceivable.

The Shī'ites, influenced by the Mu'tazilites, were driven to deny that God could reveal Himself to His creatures. Since He is not a body fitted in a certain direction, the people, believers or unbelievers, cannot see Him. Ṭabarī took another line of thinking. The question whether God is revealed or unrevealed, seen or unseen should not be reduced to our own minds. Ṭabarī seemed to doubt the ability of human minds to solve such a problem. The main source of error in the view held by the Shī'ites and the Mu'tazilites lies in their attitude towards the problem. They wrongly thought that pure reasoning could lead them to a satisfactory solution. The verses of the Qur'ān which they held as evidence for their view are described by Ṭabarī as ambiguous, mutashābih.

Ṭabarī attempted very hard to find out a solution to that difficult theological problem. The Qur'ān and the traditions of the Prophet were his main weapons. Both of them, he argued, state clearly that the believers will see their Lord in the

Hereafter. (1) He, however, appears to fall in the same error for which he blamed the Shī'ites and the Mu'tazilites when he tried to build up lengthy rational arguments in support of the doctrine of the vision of God.

The two points of the mut'a and the wiping of the sandals brought us to the conclusion of this thesis which offered us a favourable chance of comparing and contrasting between the Sunnites and the Shī'ites teachings in order to determine Ṭabarī's own position. Temporary marriage, mut'a, forms one of the considerable differences between the Sunnites and a great deal of the Shī'ites who depended on certain readings of the Qur'ān in justification of it. Ṭabarī fiercely attacked temporary marriage and rejected the Shī'ite readings which allow it. He accused the advocates of the mut'a of adding to the holy text invented words of their own. The Qur'ān, he maintained, should be taken as it is without addition or subtraction. ^{subtractive only} _{subtractive}

Ṭabarī expressed the view that in ablution an option is offered as far as the feet are concerned. The performer is free to wash or wipe uncovered feet. This is against the view of the majority of the Sunnites who held that washing is the only alternative for the bare feet. The enemies of Ṭabarī found in his view a rare chance which they did not miss. They, as we have seen, immediately spread the propaganda that Ṭabarī maintained unorthodoxical views. The fact that Ṭabarī agreed

1. Ṭabarī also emphasizes this in his Sarīḥ as-sunna, R.E.I., XXXVI: 195.

with the Shī'ites on this minor point is no evidence of Shī'ite tendencies since he disagreed with them on fundamental teachings such as that of the imamate and the return.

Even in that narrow circle of ablution Ṭabarī broke with the Shī'ites when he claimed that the wiping of the sandals is permitted; it is practiced by the Prophet himself. The Shī'ites consider the wiping of the sandals as absolutely illegal. For them this is a matter for no compromise. Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādiq is reported to have said that the wiping of the sandals is one of the few things which should not be practiced by a true Shī'ite under any circumstances. (1) This is perhaps one of the reasons why every theologian who finds himself in that controversial atmosphere thinks it necessary to clarify his position on that particular point.

In conclusion one can say that the accusation of Ṭabarī, not only of Shī'ism, but also of fabrication of prophetic traditions to promote the cause of the Rāfidites is unjustifiable. The plenty of evidence presented during the course of this work evidently points in the opposite direction.

1. Nu'mān, Da'ā'im, 1:133.

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Abbreviations:

E.B. - Encyclopaedia Britannica.

E.I. - Encyclopaedia of Islam.

I.Q. - Islamic Quarterly.

M.W. - Muslim World.

Q. - Qur'ān: translation by Marmaduke Pickthall,
The meaning of the Glorious Qur'ān, Lahore.

All quotations are from this translation with occasional slight modifications.

R.E.I. - *Révue des Études Islamiques*.

T.T. - Ṭabarī's Tafsīr.

V. - Volume.

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