



The History of al-Tabari Vol. 39: Biographies of the Prophet's Companions and Their Successors: al-Tabari's Supplement to His History (SUNY series in Near Eastern Studies)

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In the introduction to his History, al-T'abari declared his intention to append to it a biographical work for the reader's convenience. Only a collection of excerpts has survived, however. It was first published as part of the Leiden edition of the History and is now presented as a volume in the T'abari Translation Project. It brings together biographies of Companions, successors, and scholars of subsequent generations; many chapters are devoted to women related to the Prophet who played a role in the transmission of knowledge. The biographies vary in length and style, ranging from a mere identification of a person to long accounts and anecdotes.

This volume represents a long tradition characteristic of Muslim culture. Muslim scholars developed biographical literature into a rich and complex genre. It was intended to be an auxiliary branch of religious study, aimed at determining the reliability of chains of transmission through which traditions were handed down. More often than not, however, works in this genre contain valuable historical information of the kind often ignored by the authors of mainstream history books. Even though not a complete work, this volume is thus not merely a supplement to al-T'abari's History but also a source in its own right, often supplying new and rare insights into events and social conditions.

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