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سيرة الإمام الترمذي رحمه الله

# The Biography of Imām At-Tirmidhī

By

Salahuddin 'Ali Abdul Mawjood

Translated by

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grow difficult for me, I would take comfort in it.”<sup>[1]</sup>

## His Birth

At-Tirmidhī, may Allāh have mercy on him, was born in approximately the year 210 H.

Adh-Dhahabī states:

He was born near the year 210.

There is disagreement concerning him. It is said that he was born blind, but what is correct is that he became blind in his old age after having journeyed and written knowledge.<sup>[2]</sup>

Al-‘Allāmah Al-Buqā‘ī states in *Al-Kashf*:

He originated from Marw. His grandfather shifted from there during the days of Al-Layth ibn As-Sayyār and took up residence in Tirmidh (Termez). He was born and raised there.<sup>[3]</sup>

He died in the year 279H. Gunjar and others said, “Abu ‘Īsa died on the 13th of Rajab, in the year 279, at Tirmidh.”<sup>[4]</sup>



<sup>[1]</sup> Introduction of *Tuhfah Al-Aḥwadhī* (p. 274).

<sup>[2]</sup> *Siyar A‘lām An-Nubalā‘* (13/27).

<sup>[3]</sup> Introduction of *Tuhfah Al-Aḥwadhī*.

<sup>[4]</sup> *Siyar A‘lām An-Nubalā‘* (16/370).

## His Upbringing

The strong view is that he was born, grew up, and died in the city of Tirmidh. It is a well known city along the river Jayḥūn.<sup>[1]</sup>

As-Sam‘ānī said:

“He died in the village Būgh in the year 275.” He mentioned him in the book *Al-Ansāb* under the ascription of Al-Būghī.

Būgh is one of the suburbs of Tirmidh, located about

<sup>[1]</sup> Also called the *Amu Darya*.

six *Farsakhs*<sup>[1]</sup> away from it.<sup>[2]</sup>

Abū Al-Faṭḥ Al-Qushayrī Al-Ḥāfiẓ states:

It is Tirmidh with a *Kasrah*. This is what is widespread upon people's tongues such that it is like that which is *Mutawatir*.<sup>[3]</sup>

### The City of Tirmidh:

As-Sam'ānī states concerning the ascription of At-Tirmidhī:

This is an ascription to an ancient city along the river of Balkh called Jayḥūn. The people are in disagreement concerning this ascription. Some of them say, Tarmidh, others say, Turmidh, and others still say, Tirmidh. What is most commonly in use by the people of that city is Tarmidh. What we used to know of old was that it was Tirmidh. However, the proficient and the people of knowledge prefer Turmudh, and everyone claims a meaning for what they claim.

All of this is the words of As-Sam'ānī, and Allāh knows what is correct.

I have asked those who have actually seen it whether it is towards the direction of Khawarizm or the direction of *Mā Warā' an-Nahar* (Transoxania).<sup>[4]</sup> He said, rather, it is

[1] A *Farsakh* can be from three miles to six. [*Lisān al-'Arab*, "Chapter: *Farsakh*"]

The measure of the *Farsakh* varied from region to region as was fairly common before standardized universal measures were developed.

[2] *Wafayāt al-A'yān* (4/278).

[3] *Siyar A'lām An-Nubalā'* (13/274).

[4] Literally, *Mā Warā' an-Nahar* means "what is beyond the river." In English, the name for it is Transoxania, which is Latin for "Beyond the Oxus river," this being the Latin name for the Jayḥūn river.

counted as part of *Mā Warā' an-Nahar* in that direction.<sup>[1]</sup>

Ibn Baṭūṭah mentioned in his *Travels* that he entered Tirmidh, even though he is not trustworthy, I shall mention what he had to say so long as it does not contradict any reliable information that we have mentioned:

"Then we reached the city of Tirmidh to which the Imām, Abū 'Īsā Muḥammad ibn 'Īsā ibn Sawrah At-Tirmidhī, the author of *Al-Jāmi' Al-Kabīr fī As-Sunan*, is attributed. It is a large city with beautiful buildings and marketplaces, with rivers flowing through it. It possesses many gardens, grapes, and quince which are extremely fragrant.<sup>[2]</sup> There are many types of meat to be found there, and likewise much milk products.

"Its inhabitants wash their hair with it at the baths instead of *Ṭafl*.<sup>[3]</sup> The owner of every bath will have large vessels filled with milk. When a man enters the bath he takes a small vessel of it and washes his head. This moistens the hair and makes it strong. The people of India put sesame oil on their heads and they call it *Shīrj*. Afterwards, they wash their hair with *Ṭafl*, which makes the body fresh and it helps strengthen and lengthen the hair. It is for this reason that the beards of the people of India and those who reside with them are long.

"The ancient city of Tirmidh was built along the shore of the Jayḥūn, but when Genghis (Khan) destroyed it, the new city was built two miles from the river. We resided there at the *Zāwiyah* of the righteous *Shaykh*, 'Uzayzān, one of the senior scholars of great generosity. He had much wealth, houses, and gardens. He spent from his

[1] *Wafayāt Al-A'yān* (14/278).

[2] Quince are a type of fruit.

[3] A type of clay.

wealth on those coming and going. Before reaching the city, I had met with its ruler, the great King, Khudāwand Zadah. He wrote to me inviting me as a guest. Provisions would be brought to me and my companions daily for the whole length of our stay there. I also met its Qādī, Qawām Ad-Dīn, and he is headed to see the Sulṭān Tarmishīrīn, and to seek permission to travel to India..."

Then he states:

"Then the river of Jayhūn took us to the lands of Khurāsān. After our departure from Tirmidh and our crossing the valley, we traveled for a day and a half through sand and pebbles seeing no buildings before we reached the city of Balkh".<sup>[1]</sup>

### The Age in Which He Lived:

At-Tirmidhī lived in an age of advancement in the various scientific and academic fields. Many scholars reached a high level in various subjects. The science of *Ḥadīth* and its people had a great status as did all of the other sciences of the *Sharī'ah*. However, the greatest disaster was the acceptance with which the sciences of philosophy and other such sciences were received which caused all kinds of corruption to the *Ummah*. However, Allāh repels the people of evil with the people of good; such is always the case.

At-Tirmidhī was born in the year 210 H in the days of the *Khilāfah* of Banū Al-'Abbās.

The *Khilāfah* of Banū Al-'Abbās:<sup>[2]</sup>

- 1) Al-Ma'mūn Abdullah ibn Hārūn Ar-Rashīd (d. 218 H)

<sup>[1]</sup> *Rihlah ibn Baṭūṭah* (1/188).

<sup>[2]</sup> The following is summarized from *Tārīkh al-Khulafā'* (1/349-416).

Al-Ma'mūn 'Abdullāh, Abū Al-'Abbās, ibn Ar-Rashīd. He was born in the year 170 on the night of *Jumu'ah* in the middle of Rabī' Al-Awwal, the night on which Al-Hādī died, and his father became *Khalīfah*. His mother was a *Umm Walad*.<sup>[1]</sup> Her name was Marājil and she died during her childbirth. He studied knowledge in his youth.

He heard *Ahadīth* from his father Hārūn Ar-Rashīd, Hushaym, 'Abbād ibn Al-'Awwām, Yūsuf ibn 'Aṭīyyah, Abū Mu'āwiyah Aḍ-Ḍarīr, Ismā'īl ibn 'Ulayyah, Ḥajjāj Al-A'war, and others from their generation. He was educated by Al-Yazīdī and a number of *Fuqahā'* from various lands. He excelled in *Fiqh*, 'Arabic language, and history. When he reached adulthood, he turned to philosophy and the sciences of the ancients, excelling in them. This led him to adopt the view that the Qur'ān was created.

He was from the most noble of Banū Al-'Abbās and the greatest of them with respect to knowledge, understanding, courage, and leadership. He had many praiseworthy qualities, were it not for the great trial he started for the people concerning the creation of the Qur'ān.

It was during his rule that Imām At-Tirmidhī, may Allāh have mercy on him, was born.

- 2) Al-Mu'taṣim Billāh (d. 227 H)

Al-Mu'taṣim Billāh, Abū Ishāq, Muḥammad ibn Ar-Rashīd. He was born in the year 180 H.

Adh-Dhahabī states:

<sup>[1]</sup> A slavegirl who has a child by her master.

Al-Mu'taṣim would be one of the greatest and most respected *Khalīfahs* were it not for the great blemish on his reputation because of how he tested the scholars concerning the issue of the "Creation of the Qur'ān."

An-Naftūyah and Aṣ-Ṣūlī state:

Al-Mutaṣim had a number of virtues. He used to be called *Al-Mathman* because he was the eighth of the 'Abbāsī *Khalīfahs*, an eighth generation descendant of al-'Abbās, the eighth of ar-Rashīd's children, he took power in the year 218 H, his rule lasted eight years, eight months, and eight days, he was born in the year 178 H, he achieved eight conquests, he killed eight enemies, he had eight sons and eight daughters, and he died with eight days remaining in the month of *Rabī' al-Awwal*. He had a number of virtuous qualities and a number of eloquent statements have been attributed to him as well as poetry.

### 3) Al-Wāthiq Billāh (d. 232 H)

Al-Wāthiq Billāh, Hārūn Abū Ja'far, or Abū Al-Qāsim (according to another opinion), ibn Al-Mu'taṣim ibn Ar-Rashīd.

In the year 231 H, a letter from him reached the Governor of al-Baṣrah ordering him to test all the Imāms and the *Mu'adh-dhins* concerning the issue of the Creation of the Qur'ān. He followed his father in that issue, then towards the end of his life, he reversed his view. It is said that no one was as generous to the family of Abū Ṭalīb as he was. Not a single one of them died during his life a poor man (because of his great generosity to them).

Some have said, "Al-Wāthiq possessed excellent manners."

Aṣ-Ṣūlī states:

"Al-Wāthiq used to be called al-Ma'mūn al-Aṣghar (a junior al-Ma'mūn) because of his excellent manners and his virtue."

### 4) Al-Mutawakkil 'Ala Allāh (d. 247 H)

Al-Mutawakkil 'Ala Allāh, Ja'far Abū al-Faḍl, ibn al-Mu'taṣim ibn ar-Rashīd. He showed an inclination to the *Sunnah* and he aided *Ahl as-Sunnah*. It was he who ended the Inquisition concerning the creation of the Qur'ān and he wrote to all the Muslim lands ordering that the Inquisition be put to a stop in the year 234 H.

He invited the scholars of *Ḥadīth* to the city of Sāmurrā and he gave them generous gifts. He honored them and he commanded them to narrate the *Ahadīth* concerning the Attributes of Allāh and concerning the believers seeing Him in the Hereafter.<sup>[1]</sup> Consequently, Abū Bakr ibn Abī Shaybah would have a regular assembly in *Jāmi' Ar-Raṣāfah* which would be attended by thirty thousand people. His brother 'Uthmān had a regular assembly at *Jāmi' Al-Manṣūr* which also used to be attended by thirty thousand people.

As a result, all the people used to supplicate for him and praise him greatly until it was said, "There are three *Khalīfahs* (who aided the religion): Abū Bakr aṣ-

[1] This is because in the time of his predecessors, they endorsed the *Mu'tazilī* creed which rejects the Attributes of Allāh as well as rejecting that Allāh will be seen by the believers in the Hereafter.



Ṣiddīq, may Allāh be pleased with him, when he fought the apostates, 'Umar ibn 'Abdil-'Azīz when he eliminated oppression in the lands, and al-Mutawakkil when he revived the *Sunnah* and eradicated the way of the *Jahmīs*.<sup>[1]</sup>

5) Al-Muntaṣir Billāh (d. 248 H)

Al-Muntaṣir Billāh, Muḥammad Abū Ja'far, or Abū 'Abdillāh (according to another opinion), ibn al-Mutawakkil, ibn al-Mu'taṣim ibn ar-Rashīd. He was respected and possessed a sharp intellect. He sought to do good and did not fall into committing excess or oppression. He used to keep good relations with the descendants of 'Alī. He ended the state of fear that the descendants of Abū Ṭālib had been living in.<sup>[2]</sup> He died on the fifth of *Rabī' al-Ākhir* in the year 248 at twenty-six years of age or a little less than that. He only held the position of *Khalīfah* for less than six months.

6) Al-Musta'in Billāh (d. 252 H)

Al-Musta'in Billāh, Abū al-'Abbās, Aḥmad ibn al-Mu'taṣim ibn ar-Rashīd. He was the brother of al-Mutawakkil and he was a noble, generous, eloquent, and cultured man.

7) Al-Mu'tazz Billāh (d. 255 H)

Al-Mu'tazz Billāh, Muḥammad, or az-Zubayr, Abū 'Abdillāh, ibn al-Mutawakkil ibn al-Mu'taṣim ibn ar-

[1] They are a deviant sect who were followers of Jahm ibn Ṣafwān, the first person to reject many of Allāh's Attributes.

[2] The Banū 'Abbās felt the descendants of 'Alī were a potential threat to their dynasty as they might rise up and try to claim the *Khilāfah* for themselves.

Rashīd. Noone before him took the position of *Khalīfah* at as young an age as he did. He was very handsome.

'Alī ibn Ḥarb, one of the teachers of al-Mu'tazz's son in *Ḥadīth*, states, "I have not seen a *Khalīfah* better looking than him."

8) Al-Muhtadī Billāh (d. 256 H)

Al-Muhtadī Billāh, the righteous *Khalīfah*, Muḥammad Abū Ishāq, or Abū 'Abdillāh, ibn al-Wāthiq ibn al-Mu'taṣim ibn ar-Rashīd.

Al-Muhtadī was brown in color with a pleasant face. He was *Wari'*<sup>[1]</sup> and he used to perform a great deal of worship. He was just and he was strict in adhering to the Command of Allāh. He was very courageous, but he did not have any supporters.

Al-Khaṭīb states, "He fasted continuously from the time he assumed power until he was killed."

9) Al-Mu'tamid 'Ala Allāh (d. 279 H)

Al-Mu'tamid 'Alā Allāh, Abū al-'Abbās, Aḥmad ibn al-Mutawakkil. When al-Muhtadī was killed, al-Mu'tamid was in prison. They brought him about and pledged allegiance to him. Many great disturbances occurred during his reign, such as when the Africans entered al-Baṣrah. They caused much corruption and destruction. A great plague struck as a result of which more people died than can be counted. Then there were many earthquakes as a result of which many people died.

[1] *Wari'*, someone who possesses the quality of *Wara'*, or exercising caution in the matters of one's religious practice.

His brother, al-Muwaffaq, restrained him and took power in his stead. There was considerable history between al-Muwaffaq and Abū Dāwūd, part of that is that he used to love and honor him, and he even visited him in his home.

It was during his reign that many of the scholars died, amongst the authors of the Six Books, with exception of Imām An-Nasā'ī:

Imām Al-Bukhārī, Imām Muslim, Abū Dāwūd, At-Tirmidhī, and ibn Mājah.



————— *Chapter Eight*

## His Journeys in Quest for Knowledge

One of the fundamental rules of seeking knowledge for the past scholars was that one had to travel in search of knowledge. This was in order visit various people and lands. In that way, one could reach the scholars of the age and benefit from them in their knowledge and experience. It would also give the traveler much experience and familiarity with the people of his time.

Traveling is a means to free oneself of something that