

The History of al-Ṭabarī

VOLUME X

The Conquest of Arabia



TRANSLATED BY FRED M. DONNER

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Volume X of al-Ṭabari's massive chronicle is devoted to two main subjects. The first is the selection of Abū Bakr as the first caliph or successor to the Prophet Muḥammad following the Prophet's death in 632 C.E. This section of the *History* reveals some of the inner divisions that existed within the early Muslim community and sheds light on the interests and motivations of various parties in the debates that led up to Abū Bakr's acclamation as caliph.

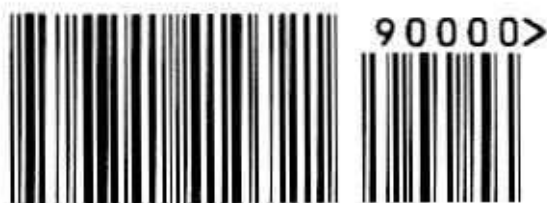
The second main subject of Volume X is the *riddah* or "apostasy"—actually a series of rebellions against Muslim domination by various tribes in Arabia that wished to break their ties with Medina following the Prophet's death. The *History* offers one of the more extensive collections of accounts about this early sequence of events to be found in the Arabic historical literature. It provides richly detailed information on the rebellions themselves and on the efforts made by Abū Bakr and his Muslim supporters to quell them. It also tells us much about relationships among the tribes of Arabia, local topography, military practice, and the key personnel, organization, and structure of the early Islamic state.

The successful suppression of the *riddah* marked the transformation of the Muslim state from a small faith community of importance only in West Arabia to a much more powerful political entity, embracing all of the Arabian peninsula and poised to unleash a wave of conquests that would shortly engulf the entire Near East and North Africa. The *riddah era* is, thus, crucial to understanding the eventual appearance of Islam as a major actor on the stage of world history.

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(Ta'rīkh al-rusul wa'l mulūk)

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by

Fred M. Donner

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In the country of Banū Ḥanzalah the only hateful [situation] that remained was that of Mālik b. Nuwayrah and those who surrounded him at al-Buṭāḥ. He was perplexed and worried.

According to al-Sarī—Shu‘ayb—Sayf—Sahl—al-Qāsim and ‘Amr b. Shu‘ayb:⁶⁵⁵ When Khālid wanted to march, he left Zafar mopping up⁶⁵⁶ Asad, Ghatafān, Ṭayyi’, and Hawāzin; so he marched heading for al-Buṭāḥ this side of al-Ḥazn, while Mālik b. Nuwayrah was there. His situation became doubtful to him, and the Anṣār hesitated [to join] Khālid and held back from him saying, “These were not the caliph’s orders to us; the caliph charged us to stand fast until he wrote to us after we had finished with al-Buzākhah and mopped up [opposition in] the people’s territory.” Whereupon Khālid said, “He did not charge you with this; rather, he charged me to proceed, and I am the commander and the one to whom communications come. Even if there reached me no letter nor any command of his, I would seize any opportunity that I perceived before informing him of it, if I thought that by informing him the opportunity would slip away from me.⁶⁵⁷ Likewise, if we were tempted by some situation about which we had no instructions from him, we would not fail to consider what was the most desirable option before us and then to act on it. Now this Mālik b. Nuwayrah is right opposite us and I am heading for him with those who are with me of the Muhājirūn and those who follow in good works; I shall not force you.” Khālid proceeded and the Anṣār repented and urged one another on, saying, “If the group achieves good [results], it is a good you will be excluded from; and if some misfortune befalls them, the people will shun you for it.” So they agreed to join with Khālid, and dispatched messengers to

[1923]

655. Cf. partial parallel in Diyarbakri, II, 209 top; Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, II, 357–58; Balansī, 50–51; Ibn Ḥubaysh, 28 (from Wāqidī); Ibn Ḥubaysh, 28 (from Ibn Ishāq); Nuwayrī, 82–83; Iṣfahānī, XIV, 66–67; Caetani, 650.

656. Here and below, *istabra’a* + direct object. Cf. Ibn Ḥubaysh, 58 (<Ibn Ishāq).

657. I.e., by causing delay while waiting for the caliph’s reply. The syntax is problematic; see the discussion of the sentence in J. Bellamy, “Arabic Yereses from the First/Second Century: The Inscription of ‘En ‘Avdat,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 35 (1990), 76, note 6, with other references and translations.

him, whereupon he waited for them until they joined him. Then he marched until he reached al-Buṭāḥ, but found no one there.

[1924] According to Abū Jaʿfar—al-Sarī b. Yaḥyā—Shuʿayb. b. Ibrāhīm—Sayf b. ʿUmar—Khuzaymah b. Shajarah al-ʿUqfānī—ʿUthmān b. Suwayd—Suwayd b. al-Mathʿabah al-Riyāḥī:⁶⁵⁸ Khālid b. al-Walīd arrived in al-Buṭāḥ, whereupon he found no one there; he found that Mālik had dispersed them among their flocks⁶⁵⁹ and forbidden them to gather when he became perplexed over his situation. [In doing so] he said, "Oh Banū Yarbūʿ, we have disobeyed our commanders, inasmuch as they called us to this religion, whereas the people held us back from it, so that we have neither prospered nor succeeded. I have reconsidered this situation and found it feasible for them without any managing (*siyāsah*). For lo, the situation is one that the people do not manage. Beware of acting in a hostile manner against a group having a mandate [from God to exercise authority];⁶⁶⁰ so disperse to your territories and enter into this cause." So they dispersed accordingly to their flocks,⁶⁶¹ and Mālik went out until he returned to his residence. When Khālid reached al-Buṭāḥ, he scattered portions of the army and ordered them to summon [the people] to Islām, and to bring to it whoever had not [yet] responded; and if he resisted, to kill him. [This] was part of that with which Abū Bakr had charged him:⁶⁶² "When you encamp someplace, make the call to prayer and the *iqāmah*.⁶⁶³ Then, if the people make the call to prayer and the *iqāmah*, leave them alone; but if they do not do so, there is no [course] but to raid them. [In that case] kill them by every means, by fire or whatever else. And if they respond to you in the call to Islām, then question them [further]; if they affirm [payment of] the alms tax,

658. Cf. Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, II, 358, intermittent parallel; Balādhurī, *Futūh*, 98–99; Nuwayrī, 83; Iṣfahānī, XIV, 67; Caetani, 653–55.

659. Here and below, *amwāl*, lit., "properties." It can refer to flocks or to real property.

660. *Qawmun ṣunīʿa lahum*.

661. Or, perhaps, "properties, lands" (*amwāl*).

662. Cf. Balansi, 53; Wathīmah, 15/56.

663. The *iqāmah* is the second call to prayer, not broadcast publicly to notify people at large, but made to the faithful gathered in the mosque to indicate that prayer is about to begin.

then accept that from them, but if they deny it, then there is no [course] but to raid them without any word [of warning]."

Then⁶⁶⁴ the cavalry brought Mālik b. Nuwayrah to [Khālid], along with some people of Banū Tha'labah b. Yarbū', of 'Āṣim and 'Ubayd and 'Arīn and Ja'far.⁶⁶⁵ The raiding party disagreed about them; among them was Abū Qatādah, who was one of those who testified that they had made the call to prayer and the *iqāmah* and had performed the prayer. So when they disagreed about them, [Khālid] ordered that they be locked up, on a cold night against which nothing was sufficient [for warmth]. [The night] began to get colder, so Khālid ordered a crier to call out, "Keep your captives warm." Now in the Kinānah dialect, when one says, "*adfi'ū al-rajul*," it means "keep him warm" or "wrap him up," but in the dialects of others it means 'kill him.'⁶⁶⁶ So the people thought, since [the word] meant 'kill' in their dialect, that he wanted them killed, so they did so; Ḍirār b. al-Azwar killed Mālik. Khālid heard the outcry, so he went out after they had finished with them; whereupon he said, "If God desires something, He effects it."

The people disagreed about them.⁶⁶⁷ Abū Qatādah said [to Khālid], "This is your doing." At this Khālid countered him with rough speech,⁶⁶⁸ whereupon (Abū Qatādah) became angry and proceeded to Abū Bakr. At this Abū Bakr became angry at (Abū Qatādah) until 'Umar spoke to him on his behalf, but (Abū Bakr) would only be content if (Abū Qatādah) returned to [Khālid]; so [Abū Qatādah] returned to [Khālid], so that he came to Medina with him.

Khālid married Umm Tamīm bt. al-Minhāl,⁶⁶⁹ and abstained [1926]

664. Cf. Balansi, 54–55; Nuwayrī, 83–84; Iṣfahānī, XIV, 67.

665. Subclans of Tha'labah b. Yarbū' of Tamīm; cf. Caskel, I, Table 69. Banū 'Ubayd genealogically included 'Āṣim; perhaps 'Ubayd here is used to refer to all clans other than 'Āṣim.

666. Evidently the crier was a Kinānī. The text is confused here, although the meaning is clear. See *Glossary; Emendanda*; Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, s.v. *dafa'a*; Wellhausen, *Skizzen*, VI, 149; Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, II, 358.

667. I.e., about whether their deaths were reprehensible.

668. Or, perhaps, "pelted him with stones" (*zabara-hu*).

669. The slain Mālik b. Nuwayrah's wife: cf. Ibn Hajar, *Iṣābah*, s.v. "Mālik b. Nuwayrah"; Diyarbakri, II, 209, calling her "Umm Mutammim."

from her so that the period between her menstruations should elapse.⁶⁷⁰ Now the Arabs used to find [the taking of] women abhorrent in war, and condemn it. 'Umar said to Abū Bakr, "In the sword of Khālid there really is forbidden behavior; and even if this [story about Mālik's execution] were not true, it is necessary for you to take retaliation on him." He pestered him about that, but Abū Bakr did not take retaliation on [any of] his tax agents or commanders.⁶⁷¹ Then he said, "Tell me, 'Umar, (Khālid) sought to clear something up but [in the process] made a mistake;⁶⁷² so stop berating him. (Abū Bakr) paid the blood price for Mālik and wrote to Khālid to come before him; so he did that to explain his story, whereupon (Abū Bakr) pardoned him and accepted [his explanation]. But (Abū Bakr) did censure him over [his] marriage to⁶⁷³ one whom the Arabs considered it disgraceful [to marry] in that way.

According to al-Sarī—Shu'ayb—Sayf—Hishām b. 'Urwah—his father:⁶⁷⁴ A group from the raiding party testified that they [themselves] had made the call to prayer and done the *iqāmah* and prayed, whereupon [the people being raided] had done likewise; whereas others testified that nothing like that had occurred, so that [those raided] were killed. [Mālik's] brother,⁶⁷⁵ Mutammim b. Nuwayrah, came begging Abū Bakr for [permission to seek vengeance for] his blood and requesting him to make [the guilty parties] captive; but he wrote to him rejecting [their] capture. 'Umar pressed him to dismiss Khālid, saying, "In his sword there really is forbidden behavior," whereupon he replied, "Oh 'Umar, I will not sheathe a sword that God has drawn against the unbelievers."

670. The idea being to wait until after she had menstruated before consummating the new marriage, thus removing any doubt about the paternity of eventual children; an allusion to the *'iddah* or "waiting period" enjoined by Islamic law. Cf. *EP*², s.v. "Idda" (Y. Linant de Bellefonds).

671. *kāna . . . 'lā yuqīdu min 'ummāli-hi wa-lā waza'ati-hi.*

672. *ta'awwala fa-'akhta'a.* Cf. Balansi, 54, Ibn Ḥubaysh, 29: *in kāna Khālidun ta'awwala amran fa-'akhta'a-hu.* Hoenerbach translates "er hat eine Erklärung gesucht und sich dabei geirrt." (Wathīmah, 12/53).

673. Cf. Wellhausen, *Skizzen*, VI, 149; *Emendanda*.

674. Cf. Diyarbakrī, II, 209; Iṣfahānī, XIV, 67–68; Caetani, 655.

675. Cf. Ibn al-Athīr, II, 359, different story.

According to al-Sarī—Shu'ayb—Sayf—Khuzaymah—'Uthmān—Suwayd:⁶⁷⁶ Mālik b. Nuwayrah was one of the hairiest of people. Now the men of the army used the heads [of the slain captives] to hold up their cooking-pots, and there was no head among them whose skin the fire did not reach except Mālik's; the pot became well-cooked but his head did not cook because of the amount of hair on it, the hair preventing [the fire's] heat from reaching the skin. Mutammim described him in verse, mentioning his slenderness.⁶⁷⁷ 'Umar had seen him when he came to the Prophet, so he said, "Was he really like that, Oh Mutammim?" He replied, "As for what I said, yes."

According to Ibn Ḥumayd—Salamah—Muḥammad b. Ishāq—Ṭalḥah b. 'Abdallāh b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq:⁶⁷⁸ Among Abū Bakr's instructions to his armies was [this]: "When you come upon one of the peoples' abodes, and then hear the call to prayer in it, desist from its people until you have asked them for what reason they were hostile. But if you do not hear the call to prayer, then launch a raid such that you kill and burn."⁶⁷⁹ Among those who testified that Mālik [b. Nuwayrah][had embraced] Islām was Abū Qatādah al-Ḥārith b. Rib'ī, a brother of Banū Salimah. He made a vow to God that he would never witness a war with Khālid b. al-Walīd after [1928] that. He used to relate that when they came upon a group they would watch them under cover of night so that the group took up arms. "Then⁶⁸⁰ we would say, 'We are Muslims,' 'whereupon they would say, 'We too are Muslims.' [So] we would say, 'Then what is the meaning of your weapons?' They would say, 'And what is the meaning of your weapons?' whereupon we would say, 'If you are as you say, then put your weapons down.' So they would put them down; then we would pray and they would pray."

676. Cf. Diyarbakrī, II, 209; Balansi, 54; Wathīmah, 12/52; Ibn Ḥubaysh, 29; Iṣfahānī, XIV, 68, which includes a couplet by Mutammim omitted in Ṭabarī.

677. Dr. Landau-Tasserion informs me that in *jāhilī* poetry slenderness is considered a praiseworthy characteristic, since it reveals that the person feeds his neighbor while remaining hungry himself.

678. Ibn Ḥubaysh, 29 top (Ibn Ishāq); Iṣfahānī, XIV, 68; Caetani, 655–56.

679. Cf. pp. 57, 59, above.

680. Cf. Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, II, 359; Balansi, 51 (both fragmentary).

Khālid used to excuse himself for killing [Mālik] [on the grounds] that [Mālik] had said, when he was interrogating him, "I think your companion⁶⁸¹ was only saying such and such." (Khālid) said, "And why didn't you reckon him a companion of yours?" Then he made him come forward and struck off his head and those of his companions. Then, when 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb learned of their murder, he spoke of it with Abū Bakr repeatedly, saying, "The enemy of God transgressed against a Muslim man, killing him and then leaping upon his wife." Khālid b. al-Walīd⁶⁸² approached [Medina] on his return until he entered the mosque, wearing a robe of his on which was iron rust, and with his head wrapped in a turban of his in which arrows had become planted. So when he entered the mosque, 'Umar went to him and pulled the arrows from his head and smashed them. Then he said, "What hypocrisy, to kill a Muslim man and then leap upon his wife! By God, I would pelt you with stones."⁶⁸³ Khālid b. al-Walīd did not speak to him, and thought that Abū Bakr would only have the same opinion about him as 'Umar, until he entered upon Abū Bakr. When he entered upon him, he told him the story and Abū Bakr pardoned him and forgave him without punishment for whatever had happened in his recent campaign. So Khālid went out when Abū Bakr favored him. 'Umar was seated in the mosque, so he said, "Come to me, you son of the world!"⁶⁸⁴ From this, 'Umar knew that Abū Bakr had favored him, so he did not speak to him and went into his house.

[1929]

The one who killed Mālik b. Nuwayrah was 'Abd b. al-Azwar al-Asadī.⁶⁸⁵

According to Ibn al-Kalbī, the one who killed Mālik b. Nuwayrah was Ḍirār b. al-Azwar.⁶⁸⁶

681. I.e., the Prophet, as a gloss in *Isfahānī*, XIV, 68 makes clear.

682. Cf. Ibn al-Athīr, II, 359, fragment; Nuwayrī, 84-85.

683. The punishment for adultery in classical Islamic law. See Joseph Schacht, *Introduction to Islamic Law*, 15-16.

684. Or: "one with the cloak": *b. umm Shamlah*. Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, II, 359 has "b. Umm Salamah."

685. According to Ibn al-Athīr, *Usd*, III, 334, same as Ḍirār b. al-Azwar; according to Ibn Ḥajar, *Isābah*, s.v., Ḍirār's brother.

686. Cf. *Wathīmah*, 12/52.