

The History of al-Ṭabarī

VOLUME XIV

The Conquest of Iran



TRANSLATED BY G. REX SMITH

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This volume covers the years 21-23/641-43 of the caliphate of 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb. It can be divided into two distinct and almost equal parts: The first concerning the Muslim conquests in Iran and the east, and the second concerning 'Umar himself, his assassination, and an assessment of the caliph and the man.

The volume begins with the caliphal order to the Muslim troops, recently victorious at the famous battle of Nihāwand in 21/641, to penetrate farther into infidel lands in the east. The might of the Persian empire had been broken, and a golden opportunity offered itself to the Muslim community to expand its territories. The territorial gains thus achieved are recounted in this volume. Moving out of the garrison towns of al-Kūfah and al-Basrah, the Muslim forces' conquests of Iṣfahān, Hamadhān, al-Rayy, Qūmis, Jurjān, Tabaristān, Azerbaijan, Khurāsān, parts of Fārs province, Kirmān, Sijistān and Makrān as far as the Indus, are all described in these pages.

Contained in these accounts of far-reaching conquests are the peace documents, which are of considerable historical importance. They are typically the documents issued by the victorious Muslim commanders on the ground to the subjugated local inhabitants, laying out in precise terms the obligations of the latter toward their Muslim conquerors in return for safe conduct.

Leaving the Muslim forces on the bank of Indus, Tabarī switches his account to Medina, where in 23/643 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb was assassinated by a Christian slave. After full accounts of this deed, the reader is provided with details of the caliph's genealogy, his physical description, his birth date and age, the names of his children and wives, and the period of time he was a Muslim. A lengthy section follows, in which the deeds of 'Umar are recounted in anecdotal form. There are also quotations from his addresses to his people and some poetic eulogies addressed to him.

The volume ends with 'Umar's appointment of the electoral council, five senior figures in the Islamic community, to decide on his successor, and the fascinating and historically greatly important account of the workings of the council with all the cut and thrust of debate and the politicking behind the scenes. Thus was 'Uthmān b. 'Affān appointed to succeed 'Umar.

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The History of al-Ṭabarī

(Ta'riḫ al-rusul wa'l-mulūk)

VOLUME XIV

The Conquest of Iran

translated and annotated
by

G. Rex Smith

The University of Manchester

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receiving the revelations from him and dictating them to them."⁷¹³

*The Account of the Electoral Council*⁷¹⁴

According to 'Umar b. Shabbah—'Alī b. Muḥammad [al-Madā'inī]—Wakī' [b. al-Jarrāḥ]—al-A'mash—Ibrāhīm, and Muḥammad b. 'Abdallāh al-Anṣārī⁷¹⁵—Ibn Abī 'Arūbah⁷¹⁶—Qatādah—Shahr b. Ḥawshab,⁷¹⁷ and Abū Mikhnaf⁷¹⁸—Yūsuf b. Yazīd⁷¹⁹—Abū al-'Abbās Sahl⁷²⁰ and Mubārak b. Faḍālah—'Ubaydallāh b. 'Umar, and Yūnus b. Abī Ishāq⁷²¹—'Amr b. Maymūn al-Awdī:⁷²² When 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb was stabbed, it was suggested to him that he should appoint a successor. "Whom shall I appoint caliph?" was his reply. "If Abū 'Ubaydah b. al-Jarrāḥ⁷²³ were alive, I would appoint him, and if my Lord questioned me, I would say, 'I heard Your prophet say that (Abū 'Ubaydah) was the guardian of this community.' If Sālim, client

713. That is, 'Uthmān and 'Alī. Five future caliphs had acted as the Prophet's secretaries: Abū Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmān, 'Alī, and Mu'āwiyah. Abū Bakr was by this time dead; 'Umar is not talking of himself here, and Mu'āwiyah also is not in question.

714. Arabic *shūrā*, the council of six appointed by 'Umar to decide on the succession. See Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh*, II, 160; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, III, 32ff.; Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, *Iqd*, IV, 273ff.; Bal'ami, *Chronique*, III, 546ff.; Ṭanṭāwī, *Akhbār*, 531ff. The reader's attention is also drawn to Abbott, *Papyri*, 80ff. Pp. 83–87 in particular include the different versions of the account of the council, with full references.

715. It is not possible to identify this narrator with certainty.

716. He died in 150/767–776. See Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, IV, 636.

717. Shahr b. Ḥawshab al-Ash'arī died ca. 112/730. See Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, IV, 369–72.

718. Abū Mikhnaf Lūṭ b. Yaḥyā died ca. 157/774. See U. Sezgin, *Abū Miḥnaf*, passim; Duri, *Rise*, 44ff., 143ff.; Rosenthal, *Historiography*, 70, 90.

719. An unidentified narrator.

720. I read tentatively from the Leiden *apparatus criticus* Sahl b. Sa'd al-Sā'idi who died ca. 88/707. See Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, IV, 252ff.

721. It is not possible to identify this narrator with certainty.

722. 'Amr b. Maymūn al-Awdī died ca. 75/694. See Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, VIII, 109–10.

723. Abū 'Ubaydah b. al-Jarrāḥ was the famous Companion and military leader on the Syrian front against the Byzantines. He died in Syria in 18/639, shortly after the conquest of Jerusalem by the Muslims. See Shaban, *History*, 31, 43; *Et*², s.v. (Gibb).

[2777] of Abū Ḥudhayfah,⁷²⁴ were alive, I would appoint him, and if my Lord questioned me, I would say, 'I heard your prophet say that Sālim loves God vehemently.'" Someone said to ('Umar), "I can point to someone, 'Abdallāh b. 'Umar.'" But ('Umar) replied, "God curse you! You were not saying this for God's sake! You wretch! How can I appoint caliph someone who has been unable to divorce his wife! We have no desire [to get involved] in your affairs. I have not found (the caliphate) so praiseworthy that I should covet it for my own family. If things turn out well, we shall have gained our reward from them; but if they turn out badly, then it is enough for the family of 'Umar that [only] one of them should be called to account and held responsible for what happened to Muḥammad's community. I have striven and have kept my own family out. If I succeed in coming out [of all this] even, and no recompense [being given to me], I shall indeed be happy. I shall look [into the matter]: if I do appoint a caliph, then someone better than I has made the appointment; but if I abandon [the idea], someone better than I has [already] done this. God will never neglect His faith."⁷²⁵

So (those with him) left and returned in the evening, suggesting to the Commander of the Faithful that he draw up a succession agreement. He replied, "I had decided after talking to you that I would look [into the matter] and appoint someone over you, the most suitable of you to bear you along the true path." And he indicated 'Alī. [He continued], "But I fell into a swoon and saw a man who had entered a garden that he had planted. He began to pick everything, both the young tender plants and the mature ones, clutching them to him and putting them beneath him. I knew that God was in control and was taking 'Umar into His mercy. I do not want to take on the burden (of the caliphate), dead as well as alive. You should [approach] that group of men who the Messenger of God said are 'among the people of paradise.' Sa'īd b. Zayd b. 'Amr b.

724. Sālim figures quite prominently in the early histories, but this is a strange assertion. See Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah*, I, 479, 679, 708, etc.; Wāqidi, *Maghāzī*, I, 9, 148, 154, etc.

725. In the first instance, if he does appoint a caliph, Abū Bakr has already done this. In the second, if he does not, Muḥammad himself did not appoint a caliph. Either way he has a precedent.

Nufayl⁷²⁶ is one of them. I am not bringing him into the matter, but rather the following six: 'Alī and 'Uthmān, sons of 'Abd Manāf,⁷²⁷ 'Abd al-Raḥmān [b. 'Awf] and Sa'd [b. Abī Waqqāṣ], maternal uncles of the Messenger of God, al-Zubayr b. al-'Awwām, the true friend and cousin of the Messenger of God, and Ṭalḥat al-Khayr b. 'Ubaydallāh.⁷²⁸ Let them select one of themselves. When they appoint a leader, [you all] should give him good help and support. If he entrusts anyone of you with authority, he should convey to him what is committed to his care."

[2778]

They left and al-'Abbās⁷²⁹ said to 'Alī, "Do not get involved with them." He replied, "I do not like dissension [in our family]." (Al-'Abbās) said, "Then you will see something you do not like!" When morning came, 'Umar summoned 'Alī, 'Uthmān, Sa'd, 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Awf, and al-Zubayr b. al-'Awwām and said, "I have looked into the matter and consider you to be the chiefs and leaders of the people. This matter will remain among you alone. When the Messenger of God died, he was well pleased with you. I have no fears for you with the people if you remain on the straight path. However, I do fear for you if there is a difference of opinion among you and the people then differ among themselves. Off you go to 'Ā'ishah's room, with her permission, and deliberate. Choose one of you." Then he added, "Do not go to 'Ā'ishah's room; rather stay near at hand." He put down his head, exhausted by the loss of blood.

So they went in and held secret discussions. But then their voices became raised and 'Abdallāh b. 'Umar exclaimed loud enough for ('Umar) to hear, "God heavens, the Commander of

726. Sa'īd b. Zayd b. 'Amr b. Nufayl, the brother-in-law of 'Umar, who with his wife, 'Umar's sister, was instrumental in the future caliph's embracing Islam. He died ca. 51/671. See Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah*, I, 226, 253.

727. A reference to the fact that both belonged to Quraysh—as did the other four—and represented both its lines through 'Abd Manāf, where the pedigree split: 'Alī was descended from 'Abd Manāf through Hāshim, whereas 'Uthmān was descended from 'Abd Manāf through 'Abd Shams.

728. Al-Zubayr was the son of the Prophet's paternal aunt. I detect no great significance in his calling Ṭalḥah Ṭalḥat al-Khayr, which I take to be a way of expressing endearment.

729. Al-'Abbās b. 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, the uncle of both the Prophet and 'Alī. See *Et*², s.v. (Watt).