

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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(Ta'riḫ al-rusul wa'l-mulūk)

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translated and annotated
by

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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).

[2779] the Faithful is not yet dead!" ('Umar) came to and said, "All of you, stop this! When I am dead, hold your consultations for three days. Let Şuhayb lead the people in prayer. Before the fourth day comes you should have your commander from among you. 'Abdallāh b. 'Umar will be there as adviser, but he shall have nothing to do with the matter [of the actual appointment]. Ṭalḥah shall share with you in the decision. If he comes within the three days, include him in your decision. If the three days go by and he does not come, make the decision nevertheless. Who will deal with Ṭalḥah for me?" "I shall," responded Sa'd b. Abī Waqqāṣ, "and he will not give a differing view, God willing." 'Umar said, "I hope he will not give a differing view, God willing. I think one of these two, 'Alī or 'Uthmān, will become leader. If it is 'Uthmān, he is a gentle person; if it is 'Alī, he has a sense of humor. How suitable he is to carry them along the true road! If you appoint Sa'd, he is worthy of the office, but if not, the one appointed should seek his assistance. I have never dismissed him for disloyalty or weakness. How perceptive 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Awf is! He is disposed to what is right. [He is] rightly guided and has a protector in God. Listen to what he has to say."

(‘Umar) said to Abū Ṭalḥah al-Anṣārī, "For a long time had God strengthened Islam through you Helpers, Abū Ṭalḥah. Select fifty Helpers and urge them to choose one of them." To al-Miqdād b. al-Aswad⁷³⁰ he said, "When you put me into my grave, assemble these people in one room to choose one of their number." To Şuhayb he said, "Lead the people in prayer for three days. Let into [the deliberations] 'Alī, 'Uthmān, al-Zubayr, Sa'd, 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Awf, and Ṭalḥah, if he arrives. Have 'Abdallāh b. 'Umar present, but he shall have nothing to do with the matter [of the actual appointment]. Stay with them and if five agree to approve of one man, but one refuses, smash in his head, or strike it off with a sword. If four agree to approve of one man, but two refuse, cut off the (latters') heads. If three approve of one of them, and three approve of another, get 'Abdallāh b.

[2780]

730. Al-Miqdād b. 'Amr/al-Aswad al-Kindī died in 33/653. See Ibn Ḥajar. *Tahdhib*, X, 285–87.