

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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[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.

'Umar to make a decision. Let whichever party in favor of which he makes his judgment select one of themselves. If they do not accept 'Abdallāh b. 'Umar's judgment, be on the same side as 'Abd al-Rahman b. 'Awf. Kill the rest if they do not go along with the general consensus."

So they left. 'Alī said to some Banū Hāshim who were with him, "If your people are obeyed [only] among themselves, you will never be appointed to positions of leadership." Al-'Abbās came to him, and ('Alī) said, "(The caliphate) has slipped from us!"⁷³¹ (Al-'Abbās) asked him how he knew. He continued, "('Umar) paired me with 'Uthmān and told us [all] to fall in with the majority. If two approve of one, and two another, [he said], we should be on the same side as 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Awf. Sa'd will not go against his cousin, 'Abd al-Raḥmān, who is related by marriage to 'Uthmān. They will all (three) agree in their opinion. 'Abd al-Raḥmān will appoint 'Uthmān to the caliphate, or 'Uthmān will appoint 'Abd al-Raḥmān. If the other two were with me, they would be of no benefit to me, to say nothing of the fact that I have hope only of one of them." Al-'Abbās said to him, "I have never urged you to do anything without your later responding to me by holding back in a way I do not like. When the Messenger of God died, I ordered you to ask him [on his death bed] who should have the rule, but you refused. After (Muḥammad's) death I ordered you to bring the matter to a speedy conclusion, but you refused. When 'Umar nominated you a member of the electoral council, I advised you to have nothing to do with them, but you refused. Just learn one thing from me: whenever people make you a proposal, say no, unless they are appointing you [caliph]. Watch out for these people; they will continue to push us out of the matter [of the caliphate] until someone else takes our [rightful] place. I swear in God's name, no such person will get (the caliphate) without the help of some evil together with which no good will be of benefit!" 'Alī replied, "If 'Uthmān survives, I shall certainly remind him of what has happened. If he dies, they will certainly take (the caliphate) by turns among themselves. If they do, they

731. That is, Banū Hāshim.