

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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'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.

will certainly find me in a position they do not like." Then he quoted the following verses, applying them to his own situation:⁷³²

I swore by the lord of the mares prancing one evening—

[but] in the morning they came, nimble, hastening to al-Muḥaṣṣab.⁷³³

"The family of Ibn Ya'mar will certainly stand apart, facing a bloody place, difficult to drink from, they being the sons of al-Shuddākh.⁷³⁴

And he turned and saw Abū Ṭalḥah, but did not like his being there. Abū Ṭalḥah said, "Nothing to be afraid of, Abū al-Ḥasan!"⁷³⁵

When 'Umar died and his bier was brought out, both 'Alī and 'Uthmān pretended not to mind which of them would pray over him. But 'Abd al-Raḥman said, "Both of you are candidates for the caliphate. This matter has nothing to do with you. It is for Ṣuhayb whom 'Umar appointed to lead the people in prayer for three (nights) until they can agree on a leader." So Ṣuhayb prayed over ('Umar). When he had been buried, al-Miqdād assembled the members of the electoral council in the house of al-Miswar b. Makhramah—another version is that it was in the treasury and yet another that it was in 'Ā'ishah's room with her permission—five in all, accompanied by Ibn 'Umar and with Ṭalḥah [still] absent. They ordered Abū Ṭalḥah to prevent anyone from disturbing them. 'Amr b. al-Āṣ and al-Mughīrah b.

[2782] Shu'bah arrived and sat at the door, but Sa'd threw pebbles at

732. The meter is *ṭawīl*. See Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, III, 33.

733. A place between Mecca and Minā, nearer to the latter. See *al-Manāsik*, 602; Bilādī, *Mu'jam*, VIII, 43–44.

734. Ya'mar b. 'Awf, nicknamed al-Shuddākh, was during the pre-Islamic period one of the arbitrators of Kinānah who gave a judgment between the tribes of Khuzā'ah and Quṣayy on the question of the Ka'bah. See Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān*, III, 28; Zabīdī, *Tāj*, VII, 278–79. The second line is the very tentative rendering of

*la-yakhtaliyan raḥṭu bni Ya'mara marī'an
naji'an banū l-Shuddākhi wirdan muṣallabā.*

'Alī here emphasises his isolation in the face of opposition.

735. Abū al-Ḥasan is 'Alī. This seems to indicate Abū Ṭalḥah's support for the Alid family.