

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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them and made them get up, saying, "You want to say, 'We were there, we were members of the electoral council.'" The electoral council argued about the affair and a great deal of talking went on among them. Abū Ṭalḥah said, "I was more afraid that you would reject (the caliphate) than I was that you would compete for it. No, by Him who has taken away 'Umar's soul, I shall give you no more than the three days that you were ordered. Then I shall sit down in my own house and see what you are up to!"

'Abd al-Raḥmān said, "Which one of you will withdraw from the (race for the caliphate), and undertake to appoint the best of you?" No one answered. So he continued, "I withdraw." 'Uthmān said, "I am the first to accept [this]. I heard the Messenger of God say, ('Abd al-Raḥmān) is trustworthy on earth and will be in heaven.'" All the members, with the exception of 'Alī who remained silent, expressed their approval. So ('Abd al-Raḥmān) said, "What do you say, Abū al-Ḥasan?" ('Alī) replied, "Give me your word you will consider truth paramount, you will not follow your whim, you will not show any preference for a relative, and you will not let the community down." ('Abd al-Raḥmān) said [to the others], "Give me your solemn promises you will stand with me against anyone who reneges [on your final decision] and you will approve of anyone I choose for you. I impose a pact with God upon myself that I shall show no preference for a relative, because he is a relative, nor shall I let down the Muslims." He took a promise from them and similarly gave them his word. ('Abd al-Raḥmān) said to 'Alī, "You say you have most right of those present to the office because of your close relationship [to the Prophet] and your long standing in and the good deeds you have done in the cause of Islam, and you have not, [in saying so], said anything remote [from the truth]. But if you were not involved in the matter and were not here at all, whom would you think of them all has most right to (the office)?" He replied, "'Uthmān." ('Abd al-Raḥmān) took 'Uthmān on one side and said, "You say you are a shaykh of Banū 'Abd Manāf and related to the Messenger of God by marriage and his cousin, an excellent man of long standing [in Islam]—and you have not said anything remote from the truth and that (the caliphate) cannot therefore be taken from you. But if you were not here, which of the members do

[2783]