

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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liphate) on condition that I make the choice. [Even] had I not done so and the choice had come back on me, I would not have wanted (the caliphate). I saw myself in a dream as if in a green meadow rich in fresh herbage.⁷⁴¹ A stallion camel came in—I have never seen such a noble stallion—and passed through like an arrow without paying attention to anything in the meadow right to the other side without stopping. A stallion followed him in immediately after and left the meadow. Then a fine thoroughbred stallion entered, dragging his halter, turning right and left, going where the other two went and leaving. Then a fourth, a stallion camel entered and pastured in the meadow. No indeed, I shall not be the fourth. No one can take the place of Abū Bakr and 'Umar after their death and [then] be approved of by the people." Sa'd replied, "I am afraid that weakness has overcome you. Do as you think best. You know what 'Umar's death bed instructions were."

Al-Zubayr and Sa'd left. ('Abd al-Raḥmān) sent al-Miswar b. Makhramah for 'Alī and talked with him in private for a long time, (the latter) not doubting that he was to be selected for the office [of caliph]. Then ('Alī) left, and ('Abd al-Raḥmān) sent al-Miswar for 'Uthmān, but the call to morning prayer interrupted their private conversation.

According to 'Amr b. Maymūn: 'Abdallāh b. 'Umar told me, [2785] "Amr, anyone who tells you that he knows what 'Abd al-Raḥmān discussed with 'Alī and 'Uthmān, does not know what he is talking about! Your Lord's decision fell on 'Uthmān."

When they had said the morning prayers, ('Abd al-Raḥmān) convened the members [of the electoral council] and sent for all the Emigrants and the Helpers of long standing [in Islam] and of excellence and the military commanders who were [in Medina]. They all assembled and there was confusion among the people in the mosque. ('Abd al-Raḥmān) said, "People, everyone wants those of the garrison towns to return to them, having learned

741. The text reads "*Innī urītu ka-rawḍatin khadrā'a*" etc. Much neater is Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, *Iqd*, IV, 278, who has *Innī ra'aytu ka-annī fī rawḍatin khadrā'a*. I have translated the latter. In the anecdote that follows the first noble stallion camel represents the Prophet, the stallion camel Abū Bakr, and the fine thoroughbred 'Umar. The fourth represents 'Umar's successor.

who their supreme commander is." Sa'īd b. Zayd said, "We think you are worthy of (the caliphate)." He replied, "Give me some different advice!" 'Ammār [b. Yāsir] said, "If you want the Muslims to be in full agreement, give 'Alī the oath of allegiance." Al-Miqdād b. al-Aswad said, "'Ammār is right; if you give 'Alī the oath of allegiance, we shall say that we are in full agreement with what you are doing." Ibn Abī Sarḥ⁷⁴² said, "If you want Quraysh to be in full agreement, give 'Uthmān the oath of allegiance." 'Abdallāh b. Abī Rabī'ah said, "He is right; if you give 'Uthmān the oath of allegiance, we shall say that we are in full agreement with what you are doing." 'Ammār upbraided Ibn Abī Sarḥ, saying, "When did you ever give the Muslims any good advice?!"

[2786] Banū Hāshim and Banū Umayyah⁷⁴³ held talks. 'Ammār said, "O people, God has ennobled us through His Prophet and strengthened us through His religion. How can you take this appointment away from those of the house of your Prophet?" A member of Banū Makhzūm⁷⁴⁴ said, "You have gone too far, Ibn Sumayyah! Why should you have anything to do with Quraysh taking the leadership for themselves?"⁷⁴⁵ Sa'd b. Abī Waqqāṣ said, "Get it over with, 'Abd al-Raḥmān, before our people fall into civil war." 'Abd al-Raḥmān said, "I have looked into [the matter] and consulted. Do not, members of the electoral council, lay yourselves open to criticism." He summoned 'Alī and said, "God's agreement and covenant is binding on you. Will you indeed act in accordance with God's Book, the practice of His Messenger and the example of the two caliphs after him?" ('Alī) replied, "I hope to do this and act thus to the best of my knowledge and ability." ('Abd al-Raḥmān) summoned 'Uthmān and said to him the same as what he had said to 'Alī. ('Uthmān) replied, "Yes." So ('Abd al-Raḥmān) gave him the oath of

742. Ibn Abī Sarḥ was 'Iyād b. 'Abdallāh b. Sa'd who died ca. 100/718. See Ibn Hajar, *Tahdhīb*, VIII, 200-1.

743. That is, the families of 'Alī and 'Uthmān, respectively.

744. Makhzūm b. Yaqaḥ, a tribal group (*baṭn*) of Lu'ayy b. Ghālib and Banū Umayyah's chief rival among Quraysh. See Zubayrī, *Nasab Quraysh*, 299-346; Ibn Hāzim, *Jamharah*, 141ff., 464; Kaḥḥālah, *Mu'jam*, III, 1058.

745. Sumayyah was a concubine, and this is therefore an insult. 'Ammār was not of Quraysh. See note 8, above. See also *Et*², s.v. "'Ammār" (Reckendorf).