

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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The History of al-Ṭabarī

(Ta'riḫ al-rusul wa'l-mulūk)

VOLUME XIV

The Conquest of Iran

translated and annotated
by

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Zubayr. He asked (al-Zubayr) the same thing and he replied "Uthmān." Then ('Abd al-Raḥmān) summoned Sa'd and said, "Whom do you advise me [to support], as we two are not candidates for (the caliphate)?" He replied, "Uthman." On the third night, ('Abd al-Raḥmān) called, "Miswar!" I replied, "At your service!" ('Abd al-Raḥmān) exclaimed, "You are asleep, when I have not slept for three [nights]! Go and call 'Alī and 'Uthmān for me. Miswar continued his account: I said, "Which shall I call first, uncle?" He replied, "Whichever one you wish." So I left and came to 'Alī—and he was the one I favored [for the caliphate]—and said, "Will you come to speak with my uncle?" ('Alī) said, "Did he send you to anyone else?" I replied that he had also sent me to 'Uthmān. ('Alī) said, "Which one of us did he order you to come to first?" I replied, "I asked him and he told me whichever one I wished. So I came to you first—you were the one I favored." So he came with me and we reached the place where people sit (*al-maqā'id*), and 'Alī took his seat there. I went in to see 'Uthmān and found him performing the *witr* prayer as dawn came up.⁷⁶² I asked him if he would come to speak with my uncle. ('Uthmān) in turn asked me, "Did he send you to anyone else?" I replied that he had also sent me to 'Alī. ('Uthmān) said, "Which one of us did he order you to come to first?" I replied, "I asked him and he told me whichever one I wished. 'Alī is where the people sit." So he came with me and we all went in to see my uncle who was standing in the *qiblah*, praying. He left [his prayers] when he saw us, then he turned to 'Alī and 'Uthmān and said, "I have asked about you and about others. I find that the people regard no one as equal to you two. Will you, 'Alī, give me your oath of office based on God's Book, the practice of His Prophet, and the deeds of Abū Bakr and 'Umar?" ('Alī) replied, "Indeed no, but [only] based on my own effort in all this and in accordance with my own ability." ('Abd al-Raḥmān) turned to 'Uthmān and said, "Will you give me your oath of office based on God's Book, the practice of His Prophet, and the deeds of Abū Bakr and 'Umar?" ('Uthmān) said, "Indeed yes." Then ('Abd al-Raḥmān) made a sign with his

[2793]

⁷⁶². The odd number of prostrations performed in prayer at night. See *SEI*, s.v. (Wensinck).

[2794] hand to his shoulders⁷⁶³ and said, "If you will come this way!" So we got up and went to the mosque where someone gave out the cry, "Everyone in for prayer!"⁷⁶⁴ 'Uthmān [later] said, "I held back, embarrassed by his haste to join 'Alī. I was at the back of the mosque." 'Abd al-Raḥmān appeared wearing the very turban that the Messenger of God had put on him and carrying his sword. He went up into the *minbar* where he stood for a long time. Then he said a prayer that the people did not hear.

'Abd al-Raḥmān) then spoke, "O people, I have questioned you in secret and openly on the question of [who will be] your leader. I have found that none of you regard [anyone else] as equal to one of these two, 'Alī or 'Uthmān. Come forward to me, 'Alī." He did so and stood beneath the *minbar*. 'Abd al-Raḥmān took his hand and said, "Will you give me your oath of office based on God's Book, the practice of His Prophet, and the deeds of Abū Bakr and 'Umar?" He replied, "No, but based on my own effort in all this and in accordance with my own ability." ('Abd al-Raḥmān) let go of ('Alī's) hand and called out, "Come forward to me, 'Uthmān." He took him by his hand, as ('Uthmān) stood where 'Alī had stood, and said, "Will you give me your oath of office based on God's Book, the practice of His Prophet, and the deeds of Abū Bakr and 'Umar?" ('Uthmān) replied, "Indeed yes!" So ('Abd al-Raḥmān) stretched right up to the ceiling of the mosque, his hand still in 'Uthmān's hand. Then he said, "O God, hear and bear witness! O God, I have placed what was my own responsibility in all this upon 'Uthmān." The people crowded round to give 'Uthmān the oath of allegiance, until they reached him at the *minbar*. 'Abd al-Raḥmān sat down where the Prophet sat in the *minbar*, and he sat 'Uthmān down on the second step. The people began to give him the oath of allegiance, but 'Alī excused himself. 'Abd al-Raḥmān quoted, "He who breaks his word, does so to his own detriment; he who keeps the agreement he has made with God, He will bring him a great reward."⁷⁶⁵ Then 'Alī came back,

[2795]

763. Thus signifying that they should walk on either side of him.

764. Arabic, *al-ṣalātu jāmi'ah*. See Dozy, *Supplément*, I, 216-17.

765. Qur'ān, XLVIII:10.

pushing his way through the people, and gave the oath of allegiance, saying, "Deceit! What deceit!"

'Abd al-'Azīz⁷⁶⁶ said, "The reason for 'Alī's mentioning deceit was simply that 'Amr b. al-'Āṣ had met 'Alī during the period the electoral council was meeting and said, "Abd al-Raḥmān is striving hard. The more you show (your) firm resolution, the less keen he is (that you be appointed). But [the more you say you will act according to] (your) effort and ability, the keener he is (that you be appointed). Then ('Amr b. al-'Āṣ) met 'Uthmān and said, "Abd al-Raḥmān is striving hard. He will indeed give you his oath of allegiance only because of firm resolution. So accept (the offer).' It was for this reason that 'Alī mentioned deceit."⁷⁶⁷

Then ('Abd al-Raḥman) went off with 'Uthmān to the house of Fāṭimah bt. Qays, where he sat down with the people. Al-Mughīrah b. Shu'bah got up to make a speech, with 'Alī sitting there, "Praise be to God, Abū Muḥammad, who has granted you success! There was indeed no one other than 'Uthmān for (the caliphate)." 'Abd al-Raḥmān said, "This is none of your business, Ibn al-Dabbāgh! I could give my own oath of allegiance to no one without your saying what you have just said about him!"

Then 'Uthmān sat at the side of the mosque and called for 'Ubaydallāh b. 'Umar, who was confined in the house of Sa'd b. Abī Waqqāṣ. He is the one from whose hand the sword had been snatched after he had killed Jufaynah,⁷⁶⁸ al-Hurmuzān, and the daughter of Abū Lu'lu'ah, saying that he was going to kill some of those who were involved in shedding his father's blood, alluding to both the Emigrants and the Helpers. Sa'd had jumped up against him, snatched the sword from his hand and tugged at his hair until he had him on the ground. He held him prisoner in his own house until 'Uthmān brought him out. [2796] 'Uthmān said to a group of Emigrants and Helpers, "Give me your advice on [what to do with] this man who has brought

766. The father of Sulaymān, see the chain of authorities, p. 154, above.

767. 'Amr later appeared as Mu'āwiyah's arbitrator against Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī, 'Alī's arbitrator, after Ṣiffin in 38/659. It appears from this text that he had long been against 'Alī.

768. Jufaynah was a Christian slave from al-Ḥīrah, see p. 163, below.