

The history of Islam

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First Session

THE ARAB CONQUEST OF IRAN AND ITS AFTERMATH

The Muslim Arabs' disastrous defeat of the Sasanian Empire opened a new chapter in the long history of Iran. In distant Hijāz in the city of Mecca, Muhammad b. Abd-Allāh had given to an idolatrous and strife-ridden people a new religion, which inculcated monotheism, its message coming to Muhammad as Revelation, conveyed to his Community later in the Qur'ān, and bade the Arabs to submit as people accountable to God and fearful of his wrath. Some of them were so inspired by this new teaching that they undertook the conquest of the world about them, to achieve at the same time in this holy war the reward of a share in the world to come, Paradise.

Muhammad's death in 11/632 was followed in his successor Abū Bakr's time by a crisis of apostasy, the Ridda, which put both the religion and the government of Medina in jeopardy. The end of the Ridda wars left the Arabs poised for Holy War for the sake of Islam, ready to challenge even Byzantium and Iran. From ancient times Iran had had contacts varying in degree of closeness and amity with the Arabs. Before the Sasanian era, Arab tribes had settled in the Tigris-Euphrates region. In Hira on the right or west bank of the Euphrates resided the House of Mundhir of the Lakhmid Arabs, who were generally accounted the tributaries of the Sasanians, as their rivals, the Ghassānids, in the desert of north Syria, were the clients and vassals of Byzantium.

The Lakhmids frequently aided the Iranians in their contests with Byzantium. Khusrau II Aparviz (591-628), according to Arab tradition, found refuge with Nu'mān Abū Qābūs, Nu'mān III, King of Hira, when fleeing from Bahrām Chubin, but when restored to his throne, he ill repaid this assistance by seizing Nu'mān, having him thrown beneath an elephant's feet, and divesting his family of Hira. And Hira had in effect become an appanage of Iran. This was the end of Lakhmid power.

The reason for this imprudence on Khusrau II's part is not clear. It is possible that his leanings towards Nestorianism, whose adherents had promoted a conspiracy against the shah, might have motivated Khusrau against him, especially since the shah had every reason to fear the influence of the Christians in his own court. But the later calamitous events between Arabs and Iranians revealed how lacking in foresight the elimination of this "puppet" Lakhmid house had been.

Second Session

The first warning was the battle known as Dhūqār, from the name of the place, near the present-day Kūfa, where it occurred. The tribes of Bakr b. Wā'il, of the vicinity of Hīra, were dissatisfied with the new ruler of Hira, Iyās of Tayy. They began raiding across the Iranian border. Near Dhūqār they fell in with two parties of Iranian horse, each comprising a thousand troopers.

The episode came to be sung in Arabic legend and verse as one of the *ayyam* : the Arabs' Heroic Days. The Bakr tribesmen took heart from their success on this day; their raids on the Iranian frontiers increased. The first major encounter between the Muslims' and Iran occurred during the reign of the first caliph, Abū Bakr (11-13/632-4). The taking of Hira and the pillage of the Arab-inhabited areas on the banks of the Euphrates had only just been completed when Abū Bakr's orders reached Khalid, to decamp with his army for Syria. This departure of Khalid from what might be described as the "Iranian front" demonstrates that Abū Bakr had as yet no ready plan for the conquest of Iran; rather the Muslims' main preoccupations in those days were still associated with the aftermath of events of the last days of the Prophet's life, and were centred on the "Syrian Problem".

'Umar b.al-Khatab succeeded as caliph. Khalid was still engaged in Syria and against Byzantium. Apprehensive on account of news of the Arab successes against Byzantium, the Iranians also turned their attention to the Euphrates situation, and now hastened to defend that frontier against the Arabs. This defence was entrusted to Rustam b. Farrukhzad, the commander of armies in Āzarbāijān. For a while the two armies confronted each other on the western side of the Euphrates at Qādisīya.

Though these figures are not free from exaggeration, there can be no doubt that the numbers of the Persians were appreciably greater. On the final day Rustam was killed and his army dispersed in flight. Amongst the quantities of spoils which fell into Arab hands was the banner which these victors termed the banner of Kābiyān.

The battle's importance for the Arabs was such that it became subject to grandiose treatment in poetry and legend, a reason for treating traditions relating to it with caution. Two months later, in accordance with the caliph's orders, Sa'd marched towards Madā'in or Ctesiphon, the celebrated Sasanian capital. Before their arrival Yazdgard with a retinue of several thousand people and all his treasure had left Ctesiphon.

Third Session

Ctesiphon's gates were opened to the Arabs, and the booty, which according to the account given by Balādhurī consisted of carpets, dresses, arms, jewels and so forth, astonished the Bedouin soldiers.

Then as is well known the caliph sent one of the Prophet's own Persian *mawālī* or clients, Salmān Fārsī, whose Iranian name is recorded as Māhbeh or Rūzbeh and who is said originally to have been an adherent of Christianity before his travels took him into the orbit of Muhammad at Medina, to be governor at Ctesiphon.

In spite of the victory which had been gained, 'Umar did not evince any great eagerness to embark on extended conquests. This was neither acceptable to the Iranians who had lost their capital, nor to the Arab warriors, aroused by the hope of further booty and imbued with hope of admission to Paradise, hopes not to be realized by a status quo. Yazdgard, who saw his throne lost, decided after Jalūlā once more to equip an army and make an attempt to rid Iraq of the Arabs, or at least prevent their invasion of western Iran. Nihāvand was considered suitable for this last stand. The engagement lasted three days, from Tuesday to Friday. Nu'mān was killed, but the battle was continued and the Iranian forces were defeated and fled from their last stand.

With this victory of Nihāvand, which the Arabs called the "Victory of Victories", the Iranians' last concerted stand against the Muslims was smashed. Concerning the real cause of this collapse, there has been much debate. Certainly one of the causes was the marked difference between classes then prevalent in Iran, and the lack of co-operation between them. Another was the differences of religion which existed, for, together with a tendency towards fatalism and belief in the power of destiny, ideas which prepared the Iranian people to accept defeat. Also, the cupidity and corruption of the mobads and their interference in politics had raised hatred against them. Another factor was the weakness of a government that in the course of four years put no less than eight rulers one after the other on the throne. Further, the aimless wars of Khusrau II also played their part in weakening the government and its finances.

Certainly the conquest of Iran, contrary to the account of Saif b. 'Umar, did not by any means reach its completion in the time of the caliphate of 'Umar b. al-Khattab; it in fact continued into Umayyad times, the Umayyad caliphate having begun in 41/661.

Fourth Session

During the caliphate of 'Umar and in the early years of 'Uthmān, Iraq, Jibāl and Fars came under the domination of the new conquerors in such a complete way that the revolutions of the latter part of 'Uthmān's time, and even the sanguinary civil wars in 'Ali's brief caliphate, afforded various claimants for the Sasanian throne no opportunity to rally any support or popular sympathy for a general rebellion or an attempt to restore Iranian independence.

Nevertheless, the people of some provinces to whom submission to the Arabs and acceptance of their new faith were not agreeable, used every available opportunity to contend with their conquerors. Thus after the murder of 'Umar b. al-Khattab the people of the district of Shāpūr rose and Kazarun was engulfed in rebellion.

In the early months of the caliphate of 'Uthmān, when Sa'd b. Abī Waqqās was for the second time made governor of Kūfa, the people of Hamadān and Ray staged an insurrection against the Arabs. Yazdgard's last refuge was Marv, whose governor was the Māhōē Sūrī already mentioned, who seems to have belonged to the great Suren family.

The monarch required of him taxes fallen into arrears. The governor incited some Hephthalites under their ruler Nīzak against him, and when the unfortunate monarch learned of the plot, fleeing the city he fell the victim of a nameless assassin in a mill in 31/651. Iran's submission to Islam, moreover, was only a very gradual process. Although the majority of them by becoming Muslim gained their freedom. But it was a qualified freedom, for they became mawālī (clients) of the Arabs, freed slaves but still dependants who, as second-class citizens, could be exposed to illtreatment and the contumely of the Arab Muslims.

When the Sasanian government fell, people who in accordance with the precepts of the Qur'ān were recognized as "People of the Book", that is to say the Jews and Christians, could continue in their former faith as *dhimmīs*, members of a recognized confession, on payment of the jizya. Moreover Islam for them spelt liberation from forced labour and military service, which in Iran formerly they had been bound to perform. They enjoyed more liberty in the performance of their religions than had been accorded them under the regime of the Zoroastrian clergy. In return for the jizya Islam took them under its protection.

Muslim treatment of the Zoroastrians varied in accordance with the policies of the caliphs and attitudes of different governors. After the time of 'Uthmān the dhimmīs in Iraq and Iran lived fairly comfortably.

Fifth Session

But the Umayyad governor Hajjaj, who went so far as to exact the jizya from monks because he was of the opinion that people became monks to avoid the tax . Muslim treatment of Magians in the Umayyad period, particularly in Fars and Khurasan, gradually became increasingly contemptuous and intolerable.

It was for this reason that a group of them in order to preserve their ancient religion, by way of the Persian Gulf, there to found a colony in India.

The adherents of other Old Iranian religions, such as Manichaeism and even Mazdakism, found in the time of the Arab invasion more scope than they had enjoyed under the Sasanians for the practice of what had to the latter been heterodoxies, to be suppressed. With the death of 'Uthmān the centre of the caliphate moved from Medina to Kūfa in Iraq, a city which had been built near to the ancient Hira and half of whose inhabitants were non-Arabs.

Ali b. Abī Tālib, the new caliph, had a considerable following in Iraq both from among the Yemenī Arabs and from among non-Arab Muslim elements, those who were known as mawālī. The caliph 'Ali, unlike 'Uthmān, was sympathetic towards the mawālī and treated them with respect, to the extent of arousing complaints on this score from his compatriots.

At the bottom of the Shī'ī reverence for the imām - the Prophet's successor - and the conception that the leadership of the community was a divine and extraordinary office, lay the Iranians' belief that the farr-i īzadī, the Divine Power or Aura, should be an essential attribute of the exercise of sovereignty. In contrast the Khārijites may be said to have been a "puritan" party in Islam, entertaining extreme democratic views verging on the anarchistic.

The mawālī habit of seeking refuge from Arab oppression in the encampments of the Khārijites and joining in their fighting continued until the end of Umayyad times. Similarly in the Shī'ī struggles against the Umayyads, the mawālī played a part. Although in the rising of Hujar b. 'Adī (51/671) and that of Husain b. 'Alī at Taff (61/680) the complexion was completely Arab, with the insurrection of Mukhtar the mawālī were with the Shī'īs; in Mukhtar's army, as is well attested, were twenty thousand of the Hamra', the Kūfan mawālī, all of Iranian origin.

Mukhtar's pretext for rising against the Umayyads was to exact revenge from the slayers of Husain b. 'Ali. At the time, however, even the Shī'īs were doubtful of his sincerity.

Sixth Session

Mukhtar exhibited a special skill in gaining the support of the mawālī, and their numbers in his forces became so great that the movement might be accounted a movement against the Arabs of Iraq. The Kūfan Arabs were disconcerted by his special regard for the mawālī elements; the complaint gained ground that in his camp not a word of Arabic could be heard. The important result achieved by Mukhtar's insurrection was the emergence of the mawālī in Iraq as a fighting force to be reckoned with. For example, a few years later, Zaid b. 'Alī, Husain b. 'Alī's grandson, came out against the Umayyads. A short time afterwards, in the year 125/742-3, his son, Yahyā b. Zaid, rebelled in Khurasan.

The Umayyads, having regard to the extraordinary way in which the realms of Islam had expanded and to the variety of elements which now composed the Muslim community, became aware that religion alone was not sufficient as a base for a great empire; some kind of national feeling was also required. They placed the caliphate on a new kind of footing, changing it into a government - an Arab government - which depended upon the protection of the Arab tribes.

Nevertheless Mu'awiya made the caliphate like kingship, hereditary in his own family, and gradually by the introduction of various ceremonies and types of etiquette, transformed it into something much more resembling an Arab monarchy, its *raison d'etre* the defence of the Arab tribes. Enough has been said to illustrate the harsh treatment of the mawālī in the matter of taxation by Umayyad governors who tended to make no distinction between Muslim converts and the dhimmīs. Indeed, during the century that had elapsed since the conquest of the Jibal and Khurasan, the Umayyads had changed the Islamic theocracy into something that could only be described as an Arab government, and the enthusiasm and idealism of Islam had been so much weakened that a rising of a group of discontented people in Khurasan under the title of protecting the Faith and the Family of the Prophet was sufficient to overthrow the Arab government.

After the conquest of Iran by Arabs, the *dihqans*, or landed aristocracy, of Sasanian times remained under the new Islamic dispensation as the government's representatives in rural areas. From the dhimmīs, besides kharāj, which only applied to those holding land, was also taken the *jizya*, so long as they remained non-Muslim.

Seventh Session

Hajjāj b. Yūsuf, the harsh governor of Iraq, returned to their villages by force those mawālī who fled their lands. In addition he used to extract from them the jizya, illegally, of course, since according to Islamic law they were exempt from this on conversion.

UMAYYADS

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When Sa'id b. 'Uthman complained of Yazid being made the caliph's heir, he was given Khurasan as a *douceur*. Enough has been said to illustrate the harsh treatment of the mawālī in the matter of taxation by Umayyad governors who tended to make no distinction between Muslim converts and the dhimmis. Conduct in such marked contrast to the manner in which the Arabs under the first four caliphs acted caused increasing dissatisfaction.

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THE UMAYYAD CALIPHATE

Immediately after his accession Yazid ordered his governor in Medina to compel Ali's son, al-Husayn, Ibn al-Zubayr, and 'Abd Allah, a son of 'Umar, who had been reluctant to recognize him as heir to the throne, to pay him homage. The first two persisted in their refusal and fled to Mecca, where they felt safer, and 'Abd Allah was the only one of the three who consented to follow the majority of Muslims. Some months later, al-Husayn was persuaded by emissaries of the pro-'Alid party in Kufa to put himself at the head of a revolt.

Eighth Session

He sent a cousin of his to prepare the ground, and, after receiving a favourable report, went to Kufa with his harem and a small escort of relatives and supporters.

In the meantime, the plot had been discovered, and the governor of that city, 'Ubayd Allah, son of the famous Ziyad, got rid of al-Husayn's cousin, and set detachments of cavalry to watch the moves of this son of 'Ali and persuade him to desist from the enterprise. When al-Husayn refused, 'Ubayd Allah's forces stopped the advance of the rebels at Karbala', and after a final summons attacked the little group of 'Alids and their supporters. As these made a fanatical resistance, they went on to slay all the fighters, and eventually killed al-Husayn, who had watched the battle from a distance (10 Muharram 61/10 October 680).

Yazid later tried to placate the hostile Medinese. the caliph was obliged to send an army of Syrians to restore order. The Medinese were defeated, and the city was given over to pillage for three days. The Syrian troops then marched on Mecca. Without the least scruple they shot stones from catapults on to the sanctuary, and during the fighting the Ka'ba was destroyed by fire. Suddenly, however, news arrived that Yazid was dead (63/683). And Yazid's son, Mu'awiya II, was proclaimed caliph

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF MARWANID POWER

The eleven succeeding Umayyad caliphs are known as Marwanids, from the name of the first member of the family to ascend the throne, Marwan b. al-Hakam. When Mu'awiya II died, Marwan was the most prominent member of the family. at this years Two such groups, formed in Syria .

These two factions had been skillfully held at bay by Mu'awiya I, but they came into conflict when a new caliph had to be chosen after the death of Mu'awiya II, because the Kalbites wanted Marwan b. al-Hakam, whereas the Qaysites would have preferred Ibn al-Zubayr. The battle between them lasted twenty days. It took place at Marj Rahit near Damascus (end of 64/July 684), and the Kalbites were victorious. Marwan I therefore ascended the throne.

Marwan reconquered Egypt, but he could not devote himself to the reorganization of the State, because he died in 65 /68 5, a few months after the battle of Marj Rahit.

Ninth Session

The task of completing the reunification of the empire was left to his able son, 'Abd al-Malik, and this was no easy matter, for the situation was still chaotic. Ibn al-Zubayr, at all events nominally, was still master of Arabia and part of 'Iraq; Kufa had fallen into the hands of a clever adventurer named al-Mukhtar, who had begun his revolt as a Shi'I.

As the possessor of Kufa, al-Mukhtar was in a position to appoint governors of his own choice in Persia, Mesopotamia and Azarbayjan. 'Abd al-Malik attacked him, but with little success, and he was eventually defeated and killed by Mus'ab, brother of Ibn al-Zubayr and governor of Basra (67/687).

When al-Mukhtar had thus been disposed of, the two claimants to the caliphate, the Umayyad and the Zubayrid, found themselves face to face, since the latter had caused himself to be proclaimed caliph while the civil war in Syria was still raging. But before giving battle, each of them had to attend to restoring order in his own territory. Ibn al-Zubayr had to deal with the Kharijites, some of whom had occupied whole areas of Arabia (Bahrayn, Yemen, Hadramawt) and were intercepting the caravans.

'Abd al-Malik had to reduce to obedience rebels of every species, and also to resist the Byzantines, who had become very enterprising.

First he defeated Mus'ab and then (72/691) he dispatched a Syrian army against Mecca under the command of a faithful adherent, al-Hajjaj. Having destroyed the Kharijites of Arabia after a campaign lasting about two years, and being now master of the whole peninsula, al-Hajjaj entered 'Iraq. He arrived in Kufa unexpectedly at the head of only a few men.

From that moment al-Hajjaj became governor of 'Iraq and ruled the people with an iron hand. Profiting by this peace imposed by force, al-Hajjaj contrived to heal the wounds caused by war, encouraged agriculture by reclaiming land and various other measures, and being himself a cultured man, did all he could to promote education. The son and heir of 'Abd al-Malik, al-Walid I, reaped the fruits of his father's labours.

There was an intensified expansion of military power, the empire attained its maximum extent. Al-Walid had money, because the financial policy of his father had been prudent, and the revenue as a result of the new conquests was enormous, while Syria and Egypt prospered, thanks to the prevailing tranquillity. On the other hand, in the eastern provinces revenue was declining. To restore it to its former level was the task of al-Hajjaj.

Tenth Session

Armies had been carefully trained and equipped by al-Hajjaj. One of these, under Qutayba b. Muslim set out for Transoxania and Farghana (87-96/706-15) and may have got as far as Kashgar in Chinese Turkistan.

While these expeditions were occupying Asiatic territory, others were organized in Egypt with a view to driving the Byzantines out of Ifriqiya. After establishing themselves firmly in the western Maghrib, and incorporating into their ranks the Berbers, who were born fighters, they turned their eager gaze towards the Iberian peninsula. The force of only 7,000 men which crossed the strait was commanded by a freedman of Miisa b. Nusayr named Tariq (whence the name of Gibraltar: Jabal Tariq, the Mount of Tariq).

THE MARWANIDS

The long reigns of 'Abd al-Malik (65-86/685-705) and al-Walid I (86-96/705-15) were followed by two short ones, those of Sulayman (a little more than two and a half years) and 'Umar II (barely two and a half years), and then by a longer one (nearly four years) of Yazid II, who lacked the necessary qualities of a ruler. Sulayman began his reign by persecuting the relatives and friends of the defunct al-Hajjaj (d. 95/714), for whom he and the new governor of 'Iraq, a son of the general al-Muhallab, named Yazid, had a profound dislike. Important for the Muslims of that time, as well as for modern historians of Islam, was the caliphate of 'Umar II.

'Umar was born in Medina, and had been brought up there by pietists, and whereas Sulayman was addicted to gluttony and vice. 'Umar was almost an ascetic, and his whole policy was dominated by a desire to remedy defects, and suppress abuses. Yazid II tried to imitate his predecessor, but his character was very different. He loved sport and music; he allowed two young female singers to acquire great influence at his court; and he was so afflicted by the death of one of them, his beloved Hababa, due to his involuntary fault, that he died a week later, or so at least we are told.

In 105/724 Hisham, the fourth son of 'Abd al-Malik, was elected caliph, and in the course of his twenty years' reign the empire recovered from the depression into which it had fallen. The north-western frontiers were consolidated, Muslim rule was re-established in territories which had been given up for lost—Transoxania, invaded by the Turks, and the Maghrib, where the Berbers had revolted.

Eleventh Session

The governor of 'Iraq and the eastern provinces, Khalid al-Qasri, was a stout collaborator of Hisham for fifteen years until he fell into disgrace. After Ziyad and al-Hajjaj, Khalid can be considered the best of the Muslim viceroys; he administered the territories entrusted to his care extremely well.

No sooner had he left his post than a Shi'I revolt broke out, led by the Husaynid, Zayd, a great-grandson of 'Ali, and the son of a slave-woman. Zaydites took part in the anti-Umayyad campaign, organized rebellions, and finally, in the ninth century, created an independent state in the mountains to the south of the Caspian, while in the closing years of that century they conquered the Yemen. Zaydism has a theological doctrine of its own, and is the most moderate type of Shi'ism.

Poetry and CULTURE IN THE Umayyad PERIOD

During the Umayyad Caliphate poetry explored new paths. This latter trend was represented by the famous trio consisting of al-Akhtal—a Christian decidedly averse to accepting Islam, but nevertheless a panegyrist of the Umayyads—Farazdaq and Jarir, these two being known chiefly for their ferocious satires. A other school freed itself from conventionalism by singing the praises of love and wine as independent themes. Outstanding among the poets of this school was the bedouin, Jamil, who sang the joys of chaste love in what are known as 'Udhrite poems, because the writers who produced verses of this kind belonged to the Banu 'Udhra. Other representatives of this school were al-Walid b. Yazid, who specialized in the Bacchic genre with a levity. during the Umayyad Caliphate there was a school at Basra in which religious questions were discussed. One of its most famous teachers was Hasan al-Basri, who died in 110/728. It was during the Umayyad era that the great problem arose as to how a Muslim who violated the law of God was to be treated.

Should he be deemed guilty of a grave sin, and therefore as an unbeliever (*kdfir*) suffer serious legal consequences, as the Kharijites demanded? Or should the task of judging him be left to God, and his formal profession of faith and adherence to the prescribed rites be considered acceptable ? This was what the Murji'ites maintained, since they feared that undue severity would prejudice the unity and the very existence of the Muslim community.

twelfth Session

At the same time, as a result of the activities of two disciples of Hasan al-Basri, there arose the Mu'tazilite movement, which advocated a compromise between these conflicting opinions concerning a Muslim guilty of grave offences; according to them he was hovering between faith and unbelief, and was therefore neither *kafir* nor *muslim*, but *fdsiq* (i.e., impious), in a state, that is to say, from which he could redeem himself by repentance.

To this theory, born of a desire to placate political disputes, Mu'tazilites added others of a more purely theological nature, and Mu'tazilism became an important doctrine during the 'Abbasid period. After the death of Hisham in 125/743, the last phase of Umayyad rule was little more than a succession of rebellions due to the general discontent. The Kharijites revolted again at Mosul, and in the surrounding district. They arose *en masse*, and succeeded in occupying Kufa, while other parties also entered the struggle.

The movement which succeeded in undermining the authority of the dynasty was that of the 'Alids and 'Abbasids. The last of the Umayyads, Marwan II (127-32/744-50), had gained military experience during the campaign in the Caucasus, and his unusual energy had earned him the nickname of *al-Himdr* ('the Wild Ass'). The Umayyads, especially the last caliphs of the line, certainly made many mistakes. They had destroyed each other in their individual lust for power, instead of forming a solid block against their adversaries. They had stirred up tribal antagonisms among the Arab elements, alternately seeking the support of the Qaysite and Kalbite factions. They had persisted in the ill-omened policy of granting privileges to the Arabs.