

CHAPTER I

THE ARAB CONQUEST OF IRAN AND ITS AFTERMATH

I. IRANIANS AND ARABS IN PRE-ISLAMIC TIMES

The Muslim Arabs' disastrous defeat of the Sāsānian Empire opened a new chapter in the long history of Iran. In distant Ḥijāz in the city of Mecca, Muḥammad b. 'Abd-Allāh had given to an idolatrous and strife-ridden people a new religion, which inculcated monotheism, its message coming to Muḥammad 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.

Muḥammad'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 faith and the polity which Muḥammad had promulgated there were shaken, but nonetheless the new Islamic vigour was enough to achieve dominion over all the Arabian Peninsula. Once the apostasy had been suppressed, closer unity followed with greater zeal to sacrifice all in a larger struggle. 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 as early as before the advent of Alexander the Great Arabs had been known to Iran. In the Sāsānian period, from A.D. 226 to 651, their jurisdiction reached as far as the western outskirts of Ctesiphon. According to Ṭabarī, *Shāpūr I* (A.D. 241–72) had settled some of the tribe of Bakr b. Wa'il in Kirmān.¹ Arab merchants, as well as Arab pirates, frequented the shores of the Persian Gulf. Arab-occupied areas in proximity to so imposing a structure as the Sāsānian state could not escape being under Iran's influence, if not its full dominion. For example, from ancient times Bahrain and Qaṭif had been Iranian protectorates. *Shāpūr II* (A.D. 309–79) had subdued the whole of the

¹ Ṭabarī, in T. Noeldeke, *Geschichte der Perser und Araber* (Leiden, 1879), p. 57.

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western side of the gulf, and it seems that from the time of Ardashir I (A.D. 226–41) the Azd tribes had chosen to settle in ‘Umān under Iranian rule. In Bahrain the Tamīm, ‘Abd al-Qais and a section of the Bakr b. Wā’il tribes were, in Hajar in the centre of Bahrain, under direct Iranian influence. From Shāpūr II’s time the Lakhmid kings of al-Ḥīra appointed there their own nominee as *amīr*, but in later Sāsānian times this amīr was generally under the supervision of a high-ranking Iranian revenue official.¹

Those Arabs under Sāsānian jurisdiction acted under that government’s protection especially in the matter of conducting overland trade with Byzantium and Egypt, through Mesopotamia (Iraq) and Syria; and with India, through the Yemen and Bahrain. The emergence of the Sāsānian navy owed a great deal to the co-operation which existed with the Arabs. Khusrau I (A.D. 531–79) intervened in Yemenī affairs on the pretext of aiding the Arabs against Byzantium, with the result that Iranian forces replaced Ethiopian there. Among the secretaries at the Sāsānian court was one for Arab affairs. He also acted as interpreter and his salary and maintenance were supplied in kind by the Ḥīra Arabs.

Thus from ancient times Iran had had contacts varying in degree of closeness and amity with the Arabs. Before the Sāsānian era, Arab tribes had settled in the Tigris–Euphrates region, though at the beginning of the era Ardashir I had wrested from them the district known as Maisān, in southern Iraq on the Persian Gulf.

In Ḥīra 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 Sāsānians, 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. Notwithstanding, in some respects their influence could become a source of annoyance to the Sāsānian state, as for example when ‘Amr b. ‘Adī, the king of Ḥīra, arose on one occasion in defence of Manichaeism, while in the end Ḥīra became the refuge of Christians. Kavādh I (488–531) arranged with Hārith b. ‘Amr b. al-Maqsūr al-Kindī, who had ousted Mundhir III from the throne of Ḥīra, that a portion of the revenue from Ḥīra should be his, provided he prevented the tribes of Bakr and Taghlib raiding over Iran’s frontiers.

In the time of Khusrau I, otherwise known as Anūshīrvān (531–79),

¹ G. Rothstein, *Die Lakhmiden in al-Ḥīra* (Berlin, 1899), p. 131.

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the Bakr tribes joined the Lakhmids and fought against the Ghassānids under the banner of Mundhīr III. Khusrau II Aparvīz (591–628), according to Arab tradition, found refuge with Nu'mān Abū Qābūs, Nu'mān III, King of Ḥīra, when fleeing from Bahrām Chūbīn, 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 Ḥīra. The state was given to Iyās of the tribe of Ṭayy, a Persian inspector being appointed to oversee what 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. Nu'mān's refusal to confer on the Shāhanshāh his horse when the latter was a fugitive, or to give one of his daughters in marriage to a relative of the shah's, do not appear sufficient cause for Khusrau's subsequent treatment of Nu'mān, who had, however, embraced Christianity. 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. The name of the Persian inspector is given in the sources as Nakhvērāghān, probably a form of his title.

No doubt the collapse of the puppet kingdom of Ḥīra was welcomed by the Iranian nobles and *mobads*, the former out of contempt for it and the latter out of religious prejudice against it; but the later calamitous events between Arabs and Iranians revealed how lacking in foresight the elimination of this "puppet" Lakhmid house had been. 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 Ḥīra, were dissatisfied with the new ruler of Ḥīra, Iyās of Ṭayy. They began raiding across the Iranian border. Near Dhūqār they fell in with two parties of Iranian horse, each comprising a thousand troopers. The tribesmen were equipped with arms the despairing Nu'mān had entrusted for safe-keeping to the chief of the Shaibānids, one of the Bakr b. Wā'il tribes, when leaving to answer the summons of Khusrau II. Thus armed, they were able to defeat utterly the Iranians, who were led by Hāmarz and Khanābarīn, both of whom were slain, their squadrons being decimated. The date of this episode, and indeed its exact nature, are uncertain. In some traditions it is suggested that the battle took place in the year of the prophet Muḥammad's birth; in others that it coincided with his opening of his mission, or a short time after the battle of Badr, 2–3/623–5. Recent research,

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however, reasonably places it between the years A.D. 604 and 611, a supposition based on the date of the ending of Nu'mān's reign, A.D. 602, and the fact that Iyās's rule lasted only until 611. The episode came to be sung in Arabic legend and verse as one of the *ayyām*: the Arabs' Heroic Days.

The Bakr tribesmen took heart from their success on this day; their raids on the Iranian frontiers increased. The removal of the Lakhmid government meant that there was no longer any restraining force, no paramount local influence to command the tribesmen's respect and have the power to rebuke them if they overstepped the bounds of what, however tenuously, had been accepted as neighbourly convention. It is not possible dogmatically to assert that the presence of the Lakhmid power would have prevented the Muslim attack on Iran and the fall of the already tottering Sāsānian state; but the absence of this screen, however flimsy it may have been, contributed to the boldness of the Muslim Arab warriors – as did the memory of Dhūqār – at the beginning of their inroads into Iran, especially as these began at a time when after Kavādh II, Shērōē (Shīrūya) (A.D. 628–9), there was a period of total insecurity and decline. Thus, amid conflicting claimants for the throne and a rapid succession of incumbents, chance was not given for a planned and continued campaign to counter these mounting inroads.

After a succession of weak monarchs and brief reigns, following the patricide Kavādh, in the year of the death of Muḥammad, the prophet of the Arabs, in Medina, Yazdgard b. Shahriyār, Yazdgard III (A.D. 632–51), was crowned in the temple of Nāhid at Iṣṭakhr in Fārs. His accession coincided with the emergence of the Arabs into a field of activity the result of which was the conquest of the whole of the ancient dominion of the Sāsānians, in a period of less than a quarter of a century.

II. FROM ḤĪRA TO MADĀ'IN

The first major encounter between the Arabs and Iran occurred during the reign of the first caliph, Abū Bakr (11–13/632–4). In his time the area from Yamāma, the Najd and eastern Arabia as far as the Persian Gulf and Gulf of 'Umān, up to the borders of Ḥīra, was in the hands of the Bakr b. Wā'il tribe, itself divided into numerous sub-tribes. In this area the celebrated Islamic warrior, Khālīd b. al-Walīd was still occupied in suppressing the remaining vestiges of the Ridda. The sub-tribes of the Bakr b. Wā'il supplied the raiders against the borders of Sāsānian

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Iran where Iranian, Nabatean and Arab peoples were mingled and living as neighbours. The fortifications on the ḤĪra frontier were mainly intended to counter these raids.

The principal Bakr b. Wā'il tribes, at this time in the Euphrates district and apt to raid Iranian soil, consisted of Shaiḃānids, 'Ijl, Qais and Taim al-Lāt. The Shaiḃānids and 'Ijlids, from the vicinity of ḤĪra, near the site of present-day Najaf, as far as Ubulla, conducted raids deep across the Iranian frontier. The chief of the Shaiḃānids was Muḥannā b. Hāritha. His raiding grounds were in the neighbourhood of ḤĪra. The 'Ijlids were led by Suwaid b. Quṭba, or one who might have been his father, Quṭba b. Qatāda; they raided in the region of Ubulla and even as far as the area of Baṣra. Both these Bakrī chiefs plundered the frontier cultivators and if pursuit of them were attempted, fled into the desert.

The stronger and bolder of the two was Muḥannā, who pitched his tents in a place known as Khaffān, on the edge of the desert not far from ḤĪra, whence he mounted highway robbery and plundering expeditions. In the first stages of the caliphate of Abū Bakr, the Shaiḃānids and the rest of the Bakr b. Wā'il tribes neither had any contact with Medina nor had they received the Islamic message. As the power of Medina, especially following Khālīd b. al-Walīd's success in suppressing the Ridda, spread as far as Yamāma, the various groups of the Bakr b. Wā'il were faced with the choice of either accepting Islam and so uniting with their Muslim Arab brethren, or of submitting to the ancient enemies, the Sāsānians, whose decline had by this time become manifest. For generations they had regarded the desert areas adjoining the scene of their activities as their natural refuge. Their custom was to seek asylum from the Persians in flight towards the desert and among their fellow-Arabs. Consequently it was with the latter that they now chose to ally themselves, in order to ensure a greater measure of immunity in their inroads on Iranian territory, freed from the threat of attack from behind. Thus Muḥannā b. Hāritha betook himself to Medina, submitting to Islam and the caliph. Furthermore, he sought the caliph's recognition of him as rightful leader of his people, whom he would bring with him to Islam, to organize them for a campaign into the Sawād of Iraq to spread Islam, ostensibly among the Arabs and Christian Nabataeans residing there.

Abū Bakr issued a decree to this effect. Muḥannā returned to Khaffān and summoned his followers to the Faith. His choice of alignment with

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the Muslims resulted in his gaining the allegiance of practically all the Arabs engaged in raids on the populous and cultivated Iranian frontier regions. The caliph, however, could not place all his confidence in the operations of the new convert. Khālīd b. al-Walīd, the same whom the Prophet had awarded the title “The Sword of God”, and in whom the caliph had implicit confidence, was immediately despatched to take charge of the campaign in ‘Irāq, while Muthannā was ordered to accept his command and in all ways assist him.

The Yamāma and Baḥrain areas having been cleansed of the Ridda disaffection, Khālīd addressed himself to ‘Irāq, his primary purpose at this stage being the chastisement of those Arabs who had sided with the apostates in the Jazīra. In other words, he was still engaged in mopping up the remnants of the Ridda. Concerning the route Khālīd took, Wāqīdī relates that it was through Faid and Tha’labīya, that is, across the Arabian desert to the district of Hīra. According to a number of other sources, he came from Baḥrain, approaching Hīra by way of Ubulla. These sources establish the fact that near Ubulla he fell in with Suwaid b. Quṭba, who joined him. Khālīd began his campaign in the Euphrates area, but his operations were little more than skirmishes with Christian Arab tribes, and the completion of suppression of the apostasy.

At that time Abū Bakr was preoccupied in Syria and Palestine. It seems unlikely that thoughts of attacking Iran had yet arisen. Saif b. ‘Umar’s narrative, that Abū Bakr, following Muthannā’s insistence, commissioned Khālīd to invade Iran according to a concerted and carefully arranged plan of campaign, would appear to be a romantic historical fiction, of the kind the ‘Irāqī Arabs in ‘Abbāsīd times (A.D. 750–1258) concocted for their own greater glorification.

In any event, and certainly in accordance with Abū Bakr’s orders, Khālīd reached the Mesopotamian area from Yamāma and Baḥrain, and his operations there are only imperfectly known and subject to dispute, but were chiefly against the Christian Arabs. It is probable that in the course of engagements with the Arabs of this region he met parties of the Iranian frontier forces. That is proved by the encounter known as the battle of Dhāt al-Salāsīl in the region between Baḥrain and Baṣra called the Ḥafīr, at a place called Kāzīma.

The Iranian frontier official in this district was called Hurmuzd. He was reputed irascible by temperament, of a tyrannous disposition, particularly in relation to his Arab subjects; so much so that the Arabs

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of the area made his pride and ill-temper the stuff of proverbs. This Hurmuzd was killed by Khālid in the battle which, apparently because of the resemblance of the ranks of the armoured Iranian cavalymen to an iron chain, came to be called Dhāt al-Salāsīl. The Iranian force he had commanded was routed.

Not long after, another engagement occurred between the two sides, in a place near the present-day Kūt al-'Amāra and called Madhār. On this occasion there is evidence that skirmishing was beginning to develop into more regular warfare; the element of surprise was lacking and preliminary preparations had been made. Two Iranian commanders, of a force comprising fugitives from the army of Hurmuzd, named Qubād and Anūshajān (it is likely that they were princes of the Sāsānid house) made a stand against Khālid, while another leader, Qārin by name, came to their aid from Madā'in. He, as well as Anūshajān and Qubād, was put to the sword with a large number of the Iranian troops, many of whom were drowned in the canal called Thany. Besides considerable booty numerous captives fell into the enemy's hands, Magian and Christian.

A further battle took place in the district of Kaskar at a place named Walaja half way between Ubulla and Hīra. The Iranian commander on this occasion is called in Arab sources Andarzghar (his title: *andarzgar?*), and his force included, in addition to Persian cavalry units, a number of Christian Arabs from the Bakrī 'Ijlids. According to the sources Khālid killed an Iranian veteran named Hazār Savār. Andarzghar fled, to perish of thirst in the desert. The triumphant Muslims captured a number of Christians besides Iranians and Khālid invested Hīra.

Near Anbār a fourth engagement occurred on the banks of the Euphrates at a village called Ullais. The Iranian commander, whose name was Jābān, was again accompanied by Christian members of the Bakr b. Wā'il tribes. Near the battleground was a channel known as the River of Blood, perhaps connected with the legend that the Arab commander, driven to wrath by the casual air of the Iranians, caused a number of captives to be put to death so that blood flowed as a river, a legend which is, incidentally, associated with several other commanders in the history of the Arab conquests.

The *marzbān* of Hīra, called Āzādbih, lost his son in an encounter with Khālid. He fled before the conqueror, who proceeded to lay siege to the fortress and town. The Christian population after tasting the

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bitterness of the siege sought a compromise, which they gained on condition of paying tribute and agreeing to act as spies among the Iranians on behalf of the Muslims, an arrangement which Khālid also exacted from the inhabitants of Ullais.

The taking of Ḥīra 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 Khālid, to decamp with his army for Syria. From Ḥīra, or perhaps to be more precise from 'Ain al-Tamr, he took the desert road to Syria and arrayed himself before the gates of Damascus. This departure of Khālid 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".

Nevertheless the fall of Ḥīra put the Iranians on their mettle and the youthful Yazdgard began to take the business of the Arabs more seriously. After several years of patience, it began to seem that he too, as Shapūr II had done, was on the point of punishing the refractory Arabs on his borders. When Muthannā felt himself threatened by the Iranian forces, he had recourse to Medina in search of reinforcements, but his arrival coincided with Abū Bakr's death (13/634). 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb succeeded as caliph. Khālid was still engaged in Syria and against Byzantium, while, moreover, 'Umar was dissatisfied with him. Though he was unable, in spite of the new caliph's urging, to muster sufficient men to fight the Iranians, Abū 'Ubaida Thaḡafī had no alternative but to go to Mesopotamia, where the caliph placed Muthannā under his command.

Abū 'Ubaida encountered the Persian force, commanded by Bahman Jādūya, at a place near the present site of Kūfa on the banks of the Euphrates, the Arabs being on the west bank in a spot called Mirwaḡa and the Iranians on the opposite bank. As the two places were linked by a bridge, the battle which followed is known as the "battle of the bridge" (A.H. 13 or 14). With great intrepidity Abū 'Ubaida succeeded in crossing this bridge and taking the battle on to the eastern bank of the river, but the sight of the Iranians' elephants and their noise and ferocity terrified the Arabs' horses. Abū 'Ubaida ordered an attack on the elephants and himself wounded a white elephant which in its anger tore him down with its trunk and trampled him under foot. An Arab of the Thaḡif tribe who had witnessed the awful slaying of his Thaḡafī

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leader went and cut the bridge in order to force the Arabs to continue the contest, but they panicked and fled. According to the tales of this battle, Muthannā made a stand against the enemy while the Arabs as best they could with the help of local folk fixed a new bridge and crossed in safety. About four thousand of them perished in this engagement and Muthannā himself received a wound from which he later died. The wonder is that the Iranians, though their victory was not gained without appreciable losses on their side, made no attempt to pursue the fleeing enemy.

Those Arabs who had accompanied Abū 'Ubaida from the Ḥijāz now returned there. A year elapsed during which there was neither thought in Medina of renewing the Persian war nor serious activity on the frontier on the part of Muthannā. Then, apparently after Ḍamascus had been secured for the Muslims, the caliph once more permitted operations against Iran. Volunteers, however, were not at first forthcoming until the Bajila tribes, who since some time before the advent of Islam had been scattered among the Arab tribes, principally in the hope of booty came forward for the task with Jarir b. 'Abd-Allāh Bajalī. A number of former apostates, whom, in spite of their repentance, Abū Bakr hitherto had not allowed participation in the *jihād*, or Wars for the Faith, also came. They were joined by groups of the Mesopotamian Arabs under Muthannā. Thus hostilities recommenced a year after the disaster of the battle of the bridge.

The Iranians meanwhile had taken no advantage of their victory to chastise the Arabs but were now under the command of Mihrān b. Mihrbandād and facing the enemy in a place called Nakhila near present-day Kūfa, through which ran a canal from the Euphrates known as Buwaib. Mihrān crossed the bridge over this stream and made a surprise attack on the Arab camp.

A severe conflict ensued and the Arabs, though Muthannā's brother, Mas'ūd b. Ḥāritha, was slain, did not break. Mihrān was killed and the leaderless Iranian army fled in confusion. Muthannā was able to seize the bridgehead and thus slay or capture many of the retreating Iranians. In this encounter, which occurred in October, A.D. 635, the Arabs, besides gaining considerable booty in cattle and baggage, were able to some extent to make amends for the battle of the bridge. Perhaps more important was the fact that news of this victory drew the caliph's attention to Mesopotamia; the second battle of the Yarmūk in August, A.D. 636 completed the conquest of Syria and the Caliph 'Umar lost no

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time in ordering part of his Syrian army to the Persian front. He now sought to augment the force on the Euphrates and recruits were called from all the Arab tribes, while 'Umar himself set out from Medina intending personally to command the expedition. His chief men counselled him against this and he appointed the Prophet's relative and one of the Prophet's companions, Sa'd b. Abi Waqqāṣ, the commander. Muthannā died soon after his success in the battle of Buwaib, from the wound received in the battle of the bridge.

Incensed by the defeat at Buwaib and possibly 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 Ruṣtam b. Farrukh^zād, the commander of armies in Āzarbāijān. For a while the two armies confronted each other on the western side of the Euphrates at Qādisiya. The authorities differ regarding the numbers of each force. The Arabs have been enumerated at from six to thirty-eight thousand; the Iranians from twenty to thirty, and by some, from sixty to over a hundred thousand men. It is unlikely that Arab manpower problems and the necessity for garrisoning the Syrian frontier would permit the Muslim army reaching such proportions, while internal troubles in Iran and the extensive frontiers which the Sāsānian rulers had always to watch would equally make the larger numbers given for the Persian army considerably more than actually could have been present. An Armenian historian, Sebeos, has given the Iranian force as eighty thousand and the Arabs as nine or ten thousand with the addition of six thousand men who came to their aid from Syria, but arrived only towards the end of the battle. Though these figures are not free from exaggeration, there can be no doubt that the numbers of the Persians were appreciably greater.

Qādisiya was a small town situated fifteen miles from the site of Kūfa and on the edge of the desert of Ṭaff. It was a frontier post, with a fort, some cultivation and palm groves. Near it at a distance of some four to six miles, was the last stage of the desert, at a spot known as 'Udhaib, with a spring. Sa'd b. Abi Waqqāṣ had his camp at 'Udhaib. Rustam had his outside Qādisiya. For a time neither side showed any haste to open hostilities, especially Rustam, for he saw in the desert of Ṭaff an ever-present refuge for the Arabs, to which they could take flight and whence they could again attack. In his view temporizing with them and reaching some reasonable basis for negotiations were the best policies.