

THE ARAB CONQUEST*

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Part One

THE ARAB CONQUEST OF IRAN

(*B. A. Litvinsky*)

The first Arab invasion of Iran

A new religion – Islam – was founded by Muhammad (d. 632) in Arabia at the beginning of the seventh century. In the ensuing conquests, the Arabs subjugated the peoples of the Near and Middle East and of North Africa, and a vast territory – extending from Spain to Sind at the time of maximum expansion and including the western part of Central Asia – came under Arab rule. The historical destiny of the peoples of Central Asia was to be profoundly influenced by the Arab conquest and the spread of Islam.

The Arabs advanced into Central Asia through Iran and so it is with Iran that the present account begins.¹ Arab tribes had settled in Mesopotamia even before the Sasanian era and the Sasanian Empire was therefore obliged to have dealings with them from the outset. According to al-Tabari, the Sasanian emperor Shapur I (241–271) actually settled one of the Arab tribes within Iran in Kerman.² Shapur II (309–379) subjugated the entire western part of the Persian Gulf. Islands were also incorporated in the Sasanian Empire and the Arab sea trade, linking the Mediterranean with India, was controlled by the Sasanians. Moreover, under Khusrau I (531–579) Iran intervened in the affairs of Yemen in an attempt to assist the Arabs against Byzantium.

Sasanian Iran also controlled the semi-independent Arab kingdom of al-Hira (located to the north of the great swamp of lower Iraq) under the Lakhmid dynasty. Under the reign of Nu^cman III (580–602), al-Hira had become increasingly independent. In spite of Nu^cman's attempts to pursue an independent policy that was inconsistent with or even contrary to

¹ This account mainly follows the ideas and materials set out in the monograph written on the Arab conquest of Iran by Kolesnikov, 1982.

² Nöldeke, Tabari, 1973, pp. 16–17.

Sasanian interests, however, the small kingdom was incapable of holding its own against its giant neighbour and was subdued. Al-Hira and its neighbouring Arab tribes nevertheless continued to be a thorn in the side of the Sasanian authorities (in 604–605, for example, they inflicted a defeat on the Sasanian forces).³ Raids by individual Arab tribes inside the boundaries of the Sasanian Empire also continued.

In the 630s, the 16-year-old *shahanshah* Yazdgird III (632–651) came to power in Iran; a group of dignitaries acted as his guardians and a regent governed on his behalf. The rule of the first caliph, Abu Bakr (632–634), began at almost exactly the same time. In the spring of 633 the caliphate's forces under Khalid b. al-Walid embarked on their first campaign within Sasanian territory. They were opposed by the troops of one of the most powerful Iranian grandees, the governor of the border zone. The Iranian soldiers were fastened together by a chain to prevent them from fleeing. In the preliminary single combat, Khalid b. al-Walid slew his Iranian adversary and the Arabs were victorious in the subsequent attack, gaining possession of the *shahanshah*'s crown valued at 100,000 drachms. Whereas 'The Persians had probably regarded the Muslim advance on al-Hira as another annoying raid of the bedouins,'⁴ the battle of Kadhima opened up the route to Iraq for the Arabs.⁵

The conquest of Iraq

The Arabs then set out to conquer Iraq, one army moving northwards from the Tigris-Euphrates delta and another moving across from the west. At a place near the harbour of ^cUbulla, the Arabs first joined battle with an Iranian army sent against them from the capital, Ctesiphon: the Arabs were again victorious. They next launched an attack against al-Hira, hitherto the main Sasanian stronghold west of the Euphrates and the key to the inner regions of Iraq. Although the Sasanian army was defeated, the local population continued to offer resistance for a time before eventually surrendering and paying tribute.

All these events occurred prior to the accession to the caliphate of ^cUmar b. al-Khattab (634–644), under whom the forces of Islam enjoyed further successes. During his rule the Arab army in Iraq came under a new military leader, Abu ^cUbaida. The Iranians also appointed a new commander-in-chief, the governor of Khurasan, Rustam b. Farrukhzad. Armour-clad war elephants helped the Iranians win one of the battles and Abu ^cUbaida himself was crushed to death by an elephant.⁶ In subsequent battles, however, the Arabs

³ Kolesnikov, 1970, pp. 74–6.

⁴ Frye, 1975, p. 56.

⁵ Al-Tabari, 1879–89, Vol. 1, pp. 2023–5; Ibn al-Athir, 1851–76, Vol. 2, p. 295.

⁶ Al-Tabari, 1879–89, Vol. 1, pp. 2175–6; Ibn al-Athir, 1851–76, Vol. 2, p. 388; al-Dinawari, 1888, p. 119; al-Baladhuri, 1866, p. 404.

regained the upper hand and their territorial expansion continued. Their victory in the second battle of Yarmuk in August 636 completed the conquest of Syria and the caliph sent part of the Syrian army to the Mesopotamian front, their ranks swelled by large numbers of fresh volunteers. ʿUmar himself had intended to command these forces, but he subsequently assigned the task to one of the Prophet's first companions, Saʿd b. Abu Waqqas. Altogether, the Arab troops in Mesopotamia numbered some 30,000, the largest Muslim military force ever assembled in that country.

Saʿd b. Abu Waqqas then sent an embassy of 14 men to the Iranian capital; they demanded land concessions beyond the Euphrates, a trading corridor and the right to trade in Mesopotamia, together with the payment of taxes and tribute. The *shahanshah* rejected these demands out of hand. Arab sources give grossly exaggerated accounts of the size of the Iranian army that was subsequently raised. These estimates range from 60,000 to 120,000, some sources even maintaining that the figure of 60,000 refers only to the so-called 'professional' soldiers of the regular army, who were accompanied by 'assistants and slaves'. According to modern researchers, however, the Iranian forces probably did not greatly outnumber the Arabs.

THE BATTLE OF AL-QADISIYYA

The Iranians moved southwards until they were close to al-Qadisiyya, a small fortified town some 30 km from Kufa, and subsequent events took place on the bank of the ʿAtiq channel. To begin with, the Iranian general, Rustam b. Farrukhzad, again engaged in negotiations that were as protracted as they were futile. Then his men forced their way over the channel by a specially constructed crossing. They were drawn up in line along the channel, with the centre reinforced by a group of 18 war elephants, and smaller numbers defending the 2 flanks. The elephants' attack proved highly effective and the Arabs were terrified. As a result, the Iranians initially had the upper hand, but the Arabs soon recovered and began to strike the elephants' trunks with their spears while the archers shot down their Persian counterparts. The Iranians were forced to retreat to their original positions.

On the second day, the Arabs were more frequently on the offensive. The Iranians' war elephants were severely wounded and their opponents mounted palanquin-like structures on camels, causing panic among the Iranian horses. The Arabs were also reinforced with a 10,000-strong detachment from Syria. On the third day, both sides fought even more doggedly. The Iranians introduced new war elephants but without success: the wounded animals merely retreated into their own lines, sowing panic and confusion. The fighting was so fierce that it continued even after nightfall. Although the Arabs succeeded in breaking through the centre of the Iranian lines, both flanks stood firm. Nature itself was against the

Iranians, who were lashed by winds of hurricane force. One of the Arab units fought its way through to Rustam b. Farrukhzad's headquarters and the general was killed in flight (according to another version, he died in single combat with Sa'd b. Abu Waqqas).

The Iranian troops retreated in panic to the eastern bank of the channel. Although individual contingents continued to offer staunch resistance, the main group was annihilated and the rest fell back. There were extremely heavy casualties. The Arabs seized the Sasanian imperial flag ornamented with precious stones.⁷ The sources disagree on the date of the battle of al-Qadisiyya; according to Kolesnikov,⁸ it took place at the end of September 636.

The Arab forces proceeded to capture the Iranian strongholds one by one, gradually drawing nearer to Ctesiphon. Yazdgird III himself fled the capital with his relatives and entourage and it surrendered without putting up any resistance. An enormously rich booty fell to the Arabs, including some of the contents of the state treasury that the fugitives had left behind in their haste. By 637 the whole of Mesopotamia had come under Arab control. According to Zarrinkub:

On entering the palace of Khusrau, Sa'd had performed an eight rak'at prayer for his victory and, because of its appropriateness in recalling the fate of those who reject God, recited the Qur'anic verse (44, 25–27) which begins with 'How many gardens and springs have they left'. He made a mosque in the citadel and the four-hundredyear-old capital of the Sāsānians became for a time the camping ground of this Muslim general.⁹

The conquest of Khuzistan

The conquest of Khuzistan then began. The Arabs were led by Abu Musa Ash'ari, the future governor of Basra. He first captured two border strongholds, the outcome being determined by victory on the battlefield. In the meantime, Yazdgird had moved to Nihavend in central Media. One after another, the towns and strongholds of Khuzistan fell to the Arabs, including the provincial capital of Ahvaz. Then began the battle for Shushtar, which was of great strategic importance. A seventh-century Syriac chronicle describes the town as follows: 'Shushtar covers a wide area and is strongly fortified by large and deep channels, surrounding it on all sides like moats.' The sources disagree on the duration of the battle, mentioning periods ranging from a few months to two years. The action began on the outer defence lines, where the Iranian troops occupied trenches. Having crushed the outer defences (the defenders retreated into the town, reinforcing its own defences),

⁷ Yusuf, 1945.

⁸ Kolesnikov, 1982.

⁹ Zarrinkub, 1975, pp. 12–13.

the Arabs stormed the fortifications but their attacks were repulsed. However, they were assisted by a traitor called Siya, who led an Arab detachment through a secret entrance by night. They killed the guards and threw open the gates. The remainder of the garrison sought refuge in the citadel, where the treasure was deposited. Their commander was Hurmuzan (or Hurmuzdan), the *marzbān* (governor) of Khuzistan. Although the garrison put up fierce resistance, beating off the Arab attacks, the defenders' strength dwindled and the citadel eventually fell. According to some sources, the *marzbān* sued for peace and his life was spared following his conversion to Islam; the majority of his companions, however, were put to death.¹⁰

The battle of Nihavend

Finally realizing what a formidable adversary he was dealing with, Yazdgird III issued a decree for the mobilization of troops, especially from the neighbouring provinces. They were to assemble in Nihavend. The forces that gathered there came from Media itself, from Persia, the Caspian provinces, Khurasan, Seistan (modern Sistan) and other regions. A huge army was formed, estimated by the sources to number between 60,000 and 150,000 men. The caliph ʿUmar also mobilized an impressive number of troops, some of whom came from Syria; Nuʿman b. ʿAmr b. Muqarrin was appointed commander-in-chief.

The Iranians drew up their troops close to Nihavend, firmly resolved to fight a defensive battle. Iron spikes were strewn in front of the lines to hinder the attacks of the Arab cavalry. Once again, the Iranian infantry were chained together in groups of five to ten men to prevent them retreating. After initial fruitless parleying, the Arabs spread the rumour that the caliph was dead and they were about to retreat, even going through some of the motions of withdrawal. The ruse worked and part of the Iranian army advanced into the open field. During the fierce fighting that resulted, both sides incurred heavy losses, but the scales eventually tipped in the Arabs' favour. Although their commander-in-chief was killed, the Arabs continued to attack and the Iranian army was routed, part of it seeking refuge in the town and the neighbouring fortress. The Iranians then abandoned the fortress, emerged on to the battlefield and continued fighting. They were utterly defeated. The ruler of Nihavend managed to conclude a charter of immunity for the population of the town, but the Arabs seized great quantities of booty, including the treasures of the fire temple. It is believed that these events occurred in 642.¹¹

¹⁰ Al-Kufi, 1968–75, Vol. 2, pp. 23–5; al-Baladhuri, 1866, pp. 380–1; al-Tabari, 1879–89, Vol. 1, pp. 2554–5; Qummi, 1934, p. 300.

¹¹ Kolesnikov, 1982, p. 111.

According to Frye, ‘this was the most difficult battle of all those which the Arabs had to fight against imperial Sasanian forces’.¹² Described as the ‘battle of battles’, its role was extremely important since it took place on the Iranian plateau. After the battle of Nihavend, the organized resistance of the Sasanian authorities came to an end. According to al-Tabari, ‘from that day on, there was no further unity among them [the Persians] and the people of the individual provinces fought their own enemies on their own territory’. After the fall of Nihavend, Yazdgird III is reported to have moved to Istakhr and from there to Kerman and finally Khurasan. Following their victory in Nihavend, the Arabs captured Hamadan, which had to be subdued on two occasions. The whole of Media was now under their control.

The sources do not give a clear-cut chronological account of the remainder of the conquest. This confusion is frequently due to the fact that many towns and even provinces had to be conquered two or more times. Isfahan was taken in 643 and 644, for example, and Ray was captured at around the same time. The Arabs’ next step was to subjugate Iran’s northern provinces. They also took possession of Persia and Kerman.

The conquest of Seistan

We shall now consider in greater detail the Arab conquest of Seistan and Khurasan, regions that form part of Central Asia. Seistan (in ancient times, Drangiana) was one of the remote eastern provinces of the Sasanian Empire. The Arab conquest of Seistan began in the middle period of the caliph ^cUthman’s rule (644–656), although the first raids had taken place under the previous caliph. ^cUthman appointed his fellow tribesman, ^cAbdallah b. Amir, future governor of Basra, with instructions to complete the conquest. Having fortified his position in Kerman, ^cAbdallah b. Amir planned to advance on Seistan. An attack was possible from the west, but this would have meant crossing the vast desert of Dasht-i Lut, which extended for a distance of some 450 km. The other approach was from the north-west via Kuhistan and Herat: it was a much easier route but those regions would first have to be conquered.

It was nevertheless decided to take the route through the desert and the first offensive took place in 650–651. ^cAbdallah b. Amir placed the attacking forces under the command of Mujashi b. Mas^cud. Many Arabs were slain in the fighting and their forces had to retreat. The following year, ^cAbdallah b. Amir himself took part in the campaign: he proceeded with the main body of the army to Khurasan, while Rabi^c b. Ziyad was sent to Seistan, where he succeeded in reaching the town of Zaliq, some 30 km from the capital Zarang. The ruler of Zaliq preferred a peace treaty to the battlefield. The Arabs then subjugated the

¹² Frye, 1975, p. 60.

towns of Karkuya, Haisun and Nashrudh before arriving in the vicinity of Zarang. They crossed the Huk, a channel or tributary of the River Helmand, and came to the walls of the capital. A fierce battle ensued and during the first attack many Muslims were killed. The second attack resulted in an Arab victory. But the town's fortifications, especially its citadel, were exceptionally strong – according to local tradition, they had been constructed by order of Kai Khusrau, Alexander the Great and Ardashir I Papakan, the cofounder of the Sasanian Empire.

Iran b. Rustam, the *marzbān* or *ispahbad* (local governor) of Zarang, then assembled the élite of the nobility and the Zoroastrian clergy, who agreed that hostilities should end even if the military commanders wished to continue fighting. A 'justification' was even found: the 'divine mission' of the Arab aliens was supposed to have been foretold in the Zoroastrian sacred books. Rabi^c b. Ziyad agreed to make peace on condition that Seistan paid an annual tribute of 1 million dirhams, to be handed over by 1,000 boy slaves (other sources say girls), each bearing a golden bowl. The entire region of Seistan was then subjugated and the conqueror, Rabi^c b. Ziyad, was appointed Arab governor. Arab- Sasanian coins minted in Seistan in 651–652 and 652–653 are known. When Rabi^c b. Ziyad was recalled to Basra some 18 months later, he was replaced by Abu Sa'id ^cAbd al-Rahman b. Samura. In the meantime, however, the local inhabitants had risen up against the Arabs and overthrown them, and the new governor had to resume military action. Zarang was subdued and this time the conquest was final. The Arab forces had extended the territory under the caliph's rule as far as India.¹³

The conquest of Khurasan

The conquest of Khurasan was bound up with the fate of the last Sasanian *shahanshah*. Abandoning Kerman, Yazdgird III had gone, according to most of the sources, straight to Khurasan (other versions say Seistan), halting in Nishapur (or, in another source, Bust). He then moved on to Merv because it was ruled by the *kanarang* (the east Iranian counterpart of *marzbān*) Mahoe, who was personally indebted to Yazdgird for his ascent to high office.¹⁴ The *shahanshah* apparently hoped to enlist the aid of the Türks and Chinese and raise a new army.

In the meantime Yazdgird had no army. He travelled with a suite of several thousand relatives, courtiers and servants, accompanied (as far as Merv) by only a small military detachment. Friction then arose between Yazdgird and his vassal Mahoe. The sources offer

¹³ Bosworth, 1968, pp. 13–25.

¹⁴ For Khurasan on the eve of the Arab conquest, see Shaban, n.d.

different explanations for this conflict: some maintain that Mahoe had already come to an agreement with the Türk *kaghan*, hoping to secede from the Sasanian Empire; according to others, Yazdgird ordered Mahoe to pay a large tax; a third group claims that the *shahanshah* wished to remove Mahoe and appoint a military leader in his place, and when this plan failed sought to replace Mahoe by his nephew. According to one account, the people of Merv had also been turned against Yazdgird and refused him entry to the town. The Türk *kaghan*, whatever his role in the affair, can hardly have been well-disposed towards the *shahanshah*.

What is certain is that a conspiracy had been hatched against Yazdgird. Having no troops at his disposal, he secretly abandoned his residence and took flight, hiding in a mill on the River Murghab with a Christian miller. The fugitive's costly apparel, jewellery and performance of the Zoroastrian rites made it easy for his pursuers to track him down. According to some sources, the miller himself murdered his illustrious guest. The funeral was organized by Merv's Christian community, who buried him in the garden of the Metropolitan of Merv. (According to another report, however, his body was taken to Istakhr.) The sources also give divergent accounts of Mahoe's fate: according to some, he sought refuge from the approaching Arabs with the Türk *kaghan*; another source claims that the people of Merv themselves delivered their *marzbān* to an agonizing death.

Yazdgird's death in 651 finally brought an end to the Sasanian Empire, but it did not halt the Arab advance. Under ^cAbdallah b. Amir, the Arabs captured Nishapur, routing Hephthalite forces from Herat province in the process. Following a siege of several months, Nishapur was finally betrayed by a member of the Iranian aristocracy and its citadel captured. Towns such as Tus, Abivard, Nisa, Sarakhs, Herat and Merv then fell to forces commanded by the Arab general Ahnaf b. Qais. Continuing eastwards, he reached and captured Balkh. Khurasan was subdued but the local population persistently rebelled against the Arabs. A long struggle still lay ahead.

Part Two

THE ARAB CONQUEST OF TRANSOXANIA

(A. H. Jalilov)

The first Arab incursions into Transoxania

Under the Umayyads, the conquest began in the 680s of parts of the right bank of the Amu Darya (an area known to the Arabs as *Mā warā 'l-nahr*: literally, 'that which is beyond the river', i.e. Transoxania). The forces came from Khurasan, where an Arab governorship had been set up with the town of Merv as its centre. At first the campaigns took the form of predatory raids. The first major raid into Transoxania was carried out by the governor of Khurasan, °Ubaidallah b. Ziyad. In 673 he crossed the Amu Darya and reached Bukhara, which at that time was ruled by the *khatun* (queen), the mother of the young *Bukhār khudāt* (ruler of Bukhara), Tughshada. After the very first skirmish she made peace with °Ubaidallah b. Ziyad, who obtained a ransom from her and returned to Merv.

In 676 the Arabs repeated their raid on Bukhara under the leadership of the new governor of Khurasan, Sa°id b. °Uthman. The *khatun* made peace with him too and he went on to Samarkand, having taken 80 hostages.¹⁵ All the attempts by Sa°id b. °Uthman to capture the town proved unsuccessful: he was forced to make peace with the inhabitants and to leave the territory of Transoxania, taking 50 Sogdian hostages with him. On his return to Medina he made slaves of them, but they killed him and then committed suicide, preferring death to slavery.¹⁶

The Arabs next raided Khwarizm, Khujand and Samarkand in 680 under the leadership of the new governor of Khurasan, Salm b. Ziyad. Their rulers also made peace with him and, after obtaining a ransom from them, he withdrew from Transoxania. Similar raids were conducted by the next-but-one governor, al- Muhallab b. Abi Sufra, and his successors up to the year 705.¹⁷ In spite of these raids, the local rulers still did not realize the seriousness

¹⁵ Narshakhi, 1897, p. 52.

¹⁶ Al-Baladhuri, 1866, p. 412; Gibb, 1923, pp. 18–19.

¹⁷ For these raids, see *Istoriya Tajikskogo naroda*, 1964, pp. 96–7.

of the Arab threat. Instead of uniting to repulse the foreign invaders, some rulers even invited their enemies into their country so that, with their help, they could settle accounts with neighbouring rulers.¹⁸

The beginning of the conquest of Transoxania

At the end of the seventh/beginning of the eighth century, Arab policy towards Central Asia underwent a fundamental change. The internecine strife among the Arabs subsided somewhat towards the end of the reign of the caliph ^cAbd al-Malik b. Marwan (685–705), and the Umayyads were able to begin the systematic conquest of Transoxania.

In the year 705, the task of conquering Transoxania was entrusted to the governor of Khurasan, Qutaiba b. Muslim (705–715), who ushered in a new and decisive stage in the conquest of Transoxania by the Umayyads. Qutaiba skilfully exploited the internal quarrels between the rulers of Central Asia. During his first campaign in Transoxania, his forces included the ruler of Balkh, and the *Chagān khudāt* (ruler of Chaganiyan) invited Qutaiba into his country to participate in a joint struggle against the ruler of the neighbouring territories of Akharun and Shuman.¹⁹ Such treason provided Qutaiba with the information he required about Transoxania and in 706 he undertook a bold campaign in the area of Bukhara.

One of the closest towns to the Amu Darya in the Bukhara oasis was the small trading centre of Paikent. This was the first place in which Qutaiba encountered stubborn resistance from the population of Transoxania. The Arabs were forced to take Paikent twice, killing all of its defenders and razing the town to the ground. In 707 and 708 Qutaiba attempted to seize the oasis of Bukhara, but was vigorously repulsed by the combined forces of Bukhara, Sughd and the Türks, and returned to Merv. It was only after making peace with the Sogdian *ikhshid* (king), Tarkhun, and driving a wedge between the allies that Qutaiba managed to capture Bukhara in 709, and Shuman, Kish and Nakhshab the following year. Tarkhun's policy of compliance with the invaders greatly displeased the Sogdians: in 710 they dethroned him and elected Ghurak in his place.²⁰ This was a convenient pretext for Qutaiba to begin the conquest of Sughd and Khwarizm. (For the conquest of Khwarizm, see [Chapter 9](#).)

In 712 the Arab commander set out against Samarkand, after incorporating military detachments from Khwarizm and Bukhara in his own main forces. The Sogdians first gave battle to the Arabs at Arbinjan; this was followed by the siege of Samarkand, which lasted

¹⁸ Al-Tabari, 1879–89, Vol. 2, p. 994.

¹⁹ Al-Baladhuri, 1866, pp. 419–20.

²⁰ Al-Tabari, 1879–89, Vol. 2, pp. 1229–30.

a month. Although the rulers of Chach (Tashkent) and Ferghana sent a small detachment to assist the people of Samarkand, the Arabs managed to destroy the force before it arrived.²¹ Exhausted by the month-long siege, the Sogdians had no option other than to surrender and to make peace on the worst possible terms. In 713 and 714, Qutaiba conducted two major campaigns against Chach and Ferghana²² and almost reached the territory of Kashgar.

The following year, Sulaiman (715–717) succeeded to the caliphate. Qutaiba b. Muslim, aware of Sulaiman's hostility to him, moved with his family to Ferghana in order to break away from the caliphate. But the Arab troops, wearied by the continuous bloody wars which had lasted for a decade, would no longer obey Qutaiba, and he and his family were killed. For several years after his death, there were no more Arab conquests in Central Asia. With the exception of a raid on Kashgar and the conquest of Dihistan (on the shores of the Caspian Sea), the Arabs launched no major campaigns to extend their dominions during the period 715–720, concentrating instead on consolidating their hold on the regions they had already conquered.

From the first stages of the conquest, the nomadic Arab nobility had attempted to colonize the conquered areas of Transoxania. This policy was widely pursued by the Arabs, particularly under Qutaiba b. Muslim, who consolidated his military victories by settling Arabs among the population and through them conducting large-scale propaganda campaigns on behalf of Islam.²³

The struggle of the peoples of Central Asia against the Umayyads

In order to attract the people to Islam, the Arabs initially offered certain privileges to converts as well as applying methods of coercion. Those who accepted Islam, for example, were exempted from payment of the *jizya* (poll-tax). But when mass conversions began and tax receipts declined, the governor of Khurasan, al-Jarrah b. ^cAbdallah al-Hakami (717–719), decreed that only converts who accepted circumcision and were acquainted with the Qur^can would be exempted from payment of the *jizya*. This gave rise to the large-scale anti-Umayyad movement of the Sogdians in the years 720–722.

There were two stages in this movement. During the first stage (720–721), the Sogdians, with the aid of the Türks, destroyed the Samarkand garrison and expelled the Arabs from the town. All the attempts by the governor of Khurasan, Sa^cid b. ^cAbd al-^cAziz b.

²¹ Ibid., Vol. 2, pp. 1242–3.

²² Ibid., Vol. 2, p. 1256.

²³ Narshakhi, 1897, p. 63.

al-Hakam (720–721), to restore Arab power in Samarkand proved unsuccessful. In the autumn of 721 he was replaced as governor by Sa'īd b. ʿAmr al-Harashi.

On his arrival in Khurasan, al-Harashi organized a major punitive expedition against the Sogdians. However, their *ikhshid*, Ghurak, instead of leading the rising, tried to persuade his subjects to offer allegiance to al-Harashi.²⁴ For these reasons, the anti-Umayyad movement among the Sogdians then entered a second stage (721–722), moving from an active to a passive struggle. Realizing that their forces were inadequate, the Sogdian rebels left their homeland and moved to regions which offered greater protection from their foes. The rebels from the western part of Sughd, led by Karzanj, the ruler of Pai (presentday Katta-kurgan), set out for Ferghana, whose king, at-Tar, promised them protection and refuge. The rebels from the eastern part of Sughd, led by Divashtich, the ruler of Panjikent, travelled east to the upper reaches of the Zerafshan. But at-Tar proved perfidious; when the Sogdians arrived he held them in Khujand and secretly informed al-Harashi of their whereabouts.²⁵ The Arab governor swiftly dispatched a large detachment and dealt brutally with the Sogdian emigrants. He also killed over 3,000 farmers in the Khujand neighbourhood because of their solidarity with the Sogdians.²⁶

After brutally annihilating the group led by Karzanj, al-Harashi rapidly dispatched a detachment against the Sogdians under Divashtich; they were occupying the fort of Abargar (now known as 'the castle on Mount Mug'), located on the left bank of the Zerafshan, some 120 km to the east of Panjikent.²⁷ At the approach of the Arabs, the Sogdians sortied and gave battle to the enemy at a distance of 6-7 km from the fort in a gorge near the village of Kum. The Arabs won and laid siege to the castle. Realizing that further resistance was useless, Divashtich gave himself up to the Arabs, who then seized and pillaged the fort. In the autumn of the same year (722), al-Harashi had Divashtich killed on the road from Kish to Arbinjan.²⁸ The defeat of this second group of rebels sealed the fate of the anti-Umayyad movement among the Sogdians in the years 720–722.²⁹

Although the Arabs dealt harshly with the movement of 720–722 and reestablished their authority over Sughd, the people of Transoxania continued their resistance, this time with

²⁴ Al-Tabari, 1879–89, Vol. 2, p. 1,439; Ibn al-Athir, 1851–76, Vol. 5, p. 78.

²⁵ Al-Tabari, 1879–89, Vol. 2, pp. 1440–2; Ibn al-Athir, 1851–76, Vol. 5, pp. 78–9.

²⁶ Al-Tabari, 1879–89, Vol. 2, pp. 1445–6; Ibn al-Athir, 1851–76, Vol. 5, p. 81.

²⁷ In 1933 various artifacts, including over 80 manuscripts, were discovered in the ruins of the fort that had once stood on Mount Mug (see *Sogdiyskie dokumenty s gory Mug*, 1962, Vol. 1; 1962, Vol. 2; 1963, Vol. 3). The excavation of ancient Panjikent, whose last ruler was Divashtich, was begun in 1947 and is still under way. The ruins of this ancient town, which ceased to exist after being conquered by the Arabs, are located to the south-east of the modern town of the same name (Jalilov and Negmatov, 1969; Belenitskiy and Raspopova, 1971; Isakov, 1982).

²⁸ Al-Tabari, 1879–89, Vol. 2, p. 1447.

²⁹ For a detailed account of this movement, see Jalilov, 1961, pp. 134–46.

the aid of the Türks. In 728, in an attempt to reduce popular discontent and consolidate Arab power in Transoxania, the governor of Khurasan, Ashras b. ʿAbdallah al-Sulami, decreed that anyone accepting Islam would be exempt from the *jizya*. So many people responded by becoming ‘Muslims’ that there was hardly anyone left to pay the *jizya*. But the abandoning of the tax conflicted with the interests of both the Arabs and the local élite. Al-Sulami therefore revoked his decision in the same year and again began to levy the *jizya* on all non-Muslims and on Muslims who had not yet been circumcized and were not familiar with the Qurʿan. This led to a major rebellion which extended to almost the whole of Transoxania.

The oasis of Bukhara became the centre of the rising, attracting rebels from Sughd and the Türks, led by their *kaghan*. The Arabs were practically driven out of Transoxania by a broad popular rising in 728: only Samarkand and Dabusiyya remained in their hands, and that was due to the indecisiveness of the *ikhshid*, Ghurak.³⁰ Al-Sulami only managed to recapture Bukhara in the summer of 729, after several months of hard fighting. In the spring of 730 a new governor of Khurasan, Junaid b. ʿAbd al-Rahman al-Murri, arrived in Bukhara to assist al-Sulami. Their joint forces reached Samarkand with great difficulty and, after consolidating the garrison there, Junaid returned to Khurasan the same year.

From that time the Arab position became more difficult in Transoxania and also in Khurasan itself. In 733–734 there was a drought and famine broke out.³¹ One cause of the famine in Khurasan was the Arabs’ loss of the Zerafshan valley, which supplied them with large quantities of grain. In 734 an antigovernment movement led by Harith b. Suraij broke out in Khurasan among the Arabs themselves, but it was rapidly crushed by the new governor, Asad b. ʿAbdallah.

Taking advantage of the troubles and disturbances among the Arabs, the people of Transoxania intensified their struggle against the invaders in the years 736–737. In response, Asad b. ʿAbdallah transferred his capital from Merv to Balkh and in 737 led an expedition to Khuttal. Armed forces from Sughd and Chach and numbers of Türks arrived to support the population of Khuttal. The Türk *kaghan*, Sulu, emerged as their overall leader and the first blow was struck against the *Chagān khudāt*, who had previously supported the Arabs.³² Asad b. ʿAbdallah fled, leaving behind his baggage train containing the plunder from Khuttal. Sulu pursued Asad and on the left bank of the Amu Darya split his forces into small detachments, which then took to looting the countryside. On hearing this news, Asad, who was preparing to abandon Balkh for Merv, rapidly went over to the attack and won a

³⁰ *Istoriya Uzbekskoy SSR*, 1955, p. 147.

³¹ Al-Tabari, 1879–89, Vol. 2, p. 1563.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 1600–1.

resounding victory over the allies not far from Kharistan. With the subsequent appointment of Nasr b. Sayyar (738–748) as governor of Khurasan and the collapse of the anti-caliphate coalition, the Arabs succeeded in consolidating their position in Transoxania.

Having taken part in the Arab conquests in the time of Qutaiba b. Muslim, Nasr b. Sayyar knew Transoxania well and he realized that it would be impossible to subdue the country by military action alone. He therefore attempted to normalize relations with the local population by peaceful means. He introduced a fixed procedure for the levying of taxes and attempted to establish close relations with the local élite, even marrying the daughter of the *Bukhār khudāt*. Through several such measures, Nasr and his comrades managed to win influential groups of the local élite over to their side and began the process whereby the Arab aristocracy merged with the local élite. Nevertheless Nasr failed to restore order in Transoxania and discontent with Umayyad policies continued to grow, not only among the people of Transoxania and the other countries conquered by the Arabs but also among the Arab population itself.

The power of the Umayyads rested on the aristocratic élite and protected its interests alone; as a result, the broad masses of the Arab population were dissatisfied with Umayyad rule. This hostility was particularly strong in Khurasan and Transoxania. In those areas, not only the lower sections of the population (who had to meet obligations such as the *kharaj*, or land tax, and the *jizya*) but even the local aristocracy harboured resentment; although the aristocracy had established close relations with the conquering élite, they did not enjoy the same rights.

This general discontent was skilfully exploited by the °Abbasids (the descendants of °Abbas, the uncle of the Prophet Muhammad), who in the 740s secretly began to conduct a vigorous propaganda campaign against the Umayyads. At a crucial stage, the °Abbasids sent Abu Muslim, a man loyal to them, to Khurasan as leader of the movement. He enjoyed great success in Khurasan and Transoxania in 747–748: when the rebellion was raised, people flocked to join him under the black banners of the °Abbasids. Although Nasr b. Sayyar vainly attempted to rally the Arabs, his forces were destroyed and the rebels seized Merv and then the whole of Khurasan. Taking advantage of his success, Abu Muslim occupied Damascus, the seat of the caliphate, in the year 750. The power of the Umayyad caliphs collapsed, to be followed by a new Arab dynasty, the °Abbasids, with its first capital at Kufa (and, subsequently, its permanent capital at Baghdad). In the battle at the Talas river (751), the Arabs defeated the Chinese.

The struggle of the peoples of Central Asia against the ʿAbbasids and the local nobility

The fall of the Umayyads and the rise to power of the ʿAbbasids did little to alter the wretched conditions of the mass of the population. Like their predecessors, the ʿAbbasids were jealous defenders of Arab dominion over other conquered countries. Not one of the promises made to the people by the ʿAbbasids and the leader of the movement, Abu Muslim (appointed governor of Khurasan after the victory over the Umayyads), was fulfilled. The people still laboured under a host of burdensome obligations, provoking popular risings from the earliest years of ʿAbbasid rule.

In 750 a rebellion erupted in Bukhara, directed not only against the ʿAbbasids but also against the local aristocracy which had sided with them. The rising was led by Sharik b. Shaikh, who encouraged his followers by saying that they had not fought the Umayyads merely in order to submit to the ʿAbbasids. Abu Muslim dispatched a force of 10,000 against them, led by Ziyad b. Salih, but in the 37 days' fighting in Bukhara that ensued, the rebels were victorious in every battle.³³ The *Bukhār khudāt*, Qutaiba, then came to the aid of Ziyad b. Salih with a force of 10,000. With the help of these soldiers (together with the fact that the rebels were suffering from a severe shortage of food), Ziyad seized the town and dealt harshly with its population. Sharik b. Shaikh was killed in one of the battles. There was a similar rising in Samarkand, which was also brutally suppressed by the same Ziyad b. Salih. Although Abu Muslim fought the rebels and jealously defended ʿAbbasid power in Khurasan and Transoxania, the ʿAbbasid rulers did not trust him and they had him murdered in 755.

The murder of Abu Muslim gave rise to a number of rebellions against the ʿAbbasids. Although Abu Muslim had not been a true popular leader, the people saw in him the man who had freed them from the Umayyad yoke and had promised to improve their lot. In 755 a rebellion broke out in Nishapur which spread to almost the whole of Khurasan and Tabaristan: it was led by Sumbad, who declared himself a follower of Abu Muslim. Although this rising too was brutally repressed by the ʿAbbasids, it provided a powerful stimulus for a larger-scale rebellion which broke out in the territory of Transoxania during the 770s and was this time headed by a genuine popular leader, Hashim b. Hakim, known by the nickname al-Muqannaʿ.

Al-Muqannaʿ was born in one of the villages of Merv. In the years of the anti-Umayyad campaigns of the ʿAbbasids, he had been one of Abu Muslim's military commanders. In 776, aware that the people of Transoxania were hostile to the policies of the ʿAbbasids,

³³ Narshakhi, 1897, p. 82.

al-Muqanna^c dispatched his emissaries to call the people to rise in open revolt against the foreign yoke and the inequality of their property status. A number of towns and villages in the Zerafshan valley and the Kashka Darya immediately announced their readiness to support al-Muqanna^c, the inhabitants of 60 villages rallying to him on a single day.³⁴ Convinced that the number of his supporters in Transoxania was growing quickly, al-Muqanna^c travelled to Kish with 36 followers. By the time he arrived, the Kashka Darya valley and the villages around Bukhara were already in the hands of his followers, ‘the people in white clothes’ (al-Muqanna^c’s followers were distinguished by their white clothes and banners, whereas the ^cAbbasid colour was black).

The caliph, al-Mahdi (775–785), sent a large force under Jibra’il b. Yahya to crush the rising. On arrival in Bukhara, Jibra’il, along with the ruler, Hussain b. Mu^caz, attacked the village of Narshakh (a rebel strongpoint in the Bukhara area) and took it after a four-month siege. Jibra’il killed two of the rebel leaders, Hakim b. Ahmad and his comrade-in-arms, Khashvi. A new battle flared up by the walls of the settlement, but the superior Muslim forces once again emerged victorious over the defenders of Narshakh. Another rebel, Hakim Baga, was killed during this battle. The rebels’ greatest success came in 777, when they controlled the entire Zerafshan valley (above the oasis of Bukhara), almost all the Kashka Darya valley and an area further south near Termez. After the fall of Narshakh, Sughd became the centre of the rebellion. The Sogdian rebels and the Türks fought Jibra’il b. Yahya at Samarkand and dealt him a series of crushing blows. In 778 a new governor of Khurasan, Mu^caz b. Muslim, advanced against the rebels with a larger force.

After the fall of Samarkand, the main forces of ‘the people in white clothes’ began to assemble at Kish, in the mountain fortress of Sanam, where al-Muqanna^c was based. The above-mentioned Sa^cid b. ^cAmr al-Harashi set out to take the fortress and crush the rising in the Kashka Darya valley.³⁵ The third and decisive stage in the rebellion now began. The defenders of the fortress put up a stubborn resistance and al-Harashi managed to seize it only after a siege in the summer of 780. All the defenders of the fortress found alive were put to death, while al-Muqanna^c, not wanting to surrender to his enemies, committed suicide.³⁶

In spite of its defeat, the rising of ‘the people in white clothes’ was of great significance in the history of Central Asia, as it shattered the foundations of the dominion of the Arab caliphate in Transoxania. The rebellion was directed not only against the foreign invaders but also against local oppressors. Its main motive force was provided by the ordinary

³⁴ Al-Tabari, 1879–89, Vol. 2, p. 1952.

³⁵ Al-Tabari, 1879–89, Vol. 3, p. 484.

³⁶ For details of al-Muqanna^c’s movement, see Aini, 1944; Bolshakov, 1976; Kadyrova, 1965; Sadighi, 1938; Yakubovskiy, 1948.

people, above all the peasantry.³⁷ Although the rising was suppressed, al-Muqanna^c's ideas survived for a long time: 'the people in white clothes' were active until the twelfth century, organizing outbreaks of rebellion in various parts of Central Asia.

In 806 a major new uprising broke out in Sughd, led by Rafi^c b. Laith. In ideological terms it was the continuation of the rising by 'the people in white clothes' and it was to have repercussions in Nasaf, Chach, Ferghana, Khujand, Ustrushana, Bukhara and several other areas of Central Asia. Because of the treachery of Rafi^c b. Laith, the caliphate managed to put down this rising in 810.³⁸ Nevertheless the peoples of Central Asia did not give up the struggle until they had thrown off the rule of the ^cAbbasids and set up their own independent state, which was finally established under the Samanids.

The Arab conquest, like all other conquests, was responsible for many deaths and destroyed urban life. As a result of military action and fierce battles, the irrigation systems, which were left unattended, fell into ruin and became blocked, while beautiful works of calligraphy, architecture and art were destroyed. Islam replaced the former local beliefs and cults as the official religion of Transoxania. The population paid the *kharaj*, the *jizya* and other taxes to the Arabs and carried out various types of forced labour. Naturally, this impeded the further development of productive forces and of culture for a considerable period. At the same time, the Arab conquest brought large parts of the East into contact with each other, enabling them to develop economic and cultural exchanges, and this paved the way for the subsequent development of the culture of the peoples of Central Asia under different conditions and an absolutely new religious ideology, which influenced and determined private, public and state life.³⁹

³⁷ Gafurov, 1972, p. 331.

³⁸ For details of this rising, see Kadyrova, 1965, pp. 139 et seq.

³⁹ Gibb, 1923; Jalilov, 1961; Kolesnikov, 1982.

Part Three

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE ARAB CONQUEST

(*A. I. Kolesnikov*)

The Arab conquest of the Sasanian Empire, except for its extreme northern and eastern provinces, was completed in the middle of the seventh century. Although pockets of resistance were still encountered, politically the whole of Mesopotamia and the Iranian uplands fell to the Eastern caliphate, which was ruled by the caliph's governors in Basra and Kufa.⁴⁰

Reasons for the fall of the Sasanian Empire

Among the factors that hastened the fall of Sasanian Iran, the most important were: the reverses suffered in the protracted war with Byzantium (604–628); five years of civil war in Iran; and the economic collapse within the Sasanian Empire. Nevertheless, the military aspect of the conquest should not be overlooked. In military terms the Arabs proved formidable opponents; they were masters of weaponry, tactics and military strategy. In the great battles of the period of conquest, the Sasanian and Arab forces were practically on a par.⁴¹

The great ethnic and religious diversity within the population contributed to the Arab success in Mesopotamia. The area had been settled by Arabs, Syrians and Jews (professing Christianity and Judaism) who were persecuted by the official Zoroastrian Church. By no means all of them welcomed the Muslim forces, although if conditions were favourable they were willing to collaborate.

A major factor in the Arab victory was the founding of garrison towns, which acted as springboards for the eastward military expansion of Islam. Basra and Kufa became the

⁴⁰ Most of the information about events in Iran at the time of the conquest is taken from a monograph on this period by Kolesnikov, 1982.

⁴¹ Al-Tabari, 1879–89, Vol. 1, pp. 2265–6.

residences of the caliph's governors, who ruled the eastern part of the caliphate. They appointed Arab military leaders as their provincial deputies.

Relations between Muslims and non-Muslims in the first century A.H.

Relations between the Muslims and the subject population of the Sasanian Empire were regulated by peace treaties that established the parties' mutual obligations. The conquered were obliged to pay an indemnity and/or the *jizya* (poll-tax), as well as other dues. If the conditions of the agreement were respected, the victors guaranteed their subjects security of person and of property, defence from external enemies and the right to practise their various religions and follow their own way of life.

The conditions of the treaty for non-Muslims and the scale of the indemnity levied on them partly depended on the way in which the territory had been subjugated – whether 'by force of arms' (*anwatan*) or 'by peaceful means' *ṣulḥan*) – and on the resources of the population. In the historical tradition of early Islam (the works of al-Baladhuri, al-Tabari, al-Kufi and others) and in the legal works written between the eighth and the tenth century, the term *anwatan* is always opposed to *ṣulḥan*. The former means either that the local population did not accept the terms of the treaty proposed by the Arabs, or that the Arabs did not accept the conditions of their adversary, so that the matter was decided by force. If an area was subjugated 'by force of arms', part of the population was put to death or enslaved; those who escaped such a fate were constrained to pay heavy taxes, or were forced to emigrate, or had to conclude an agreement with the victors at great disadvantage to themselves. Subjugation 'by peaceful means' did not exclude military action, as long as it ended with the signing of a peace treaty by both sides.

Treaties on Iranian territory in the years of conquest were signed on the Arab side by the military commander, and on behalf of the local population by the governor of the town, district or province; in areas with a Christian population, treaties were signed by the bishop or the elders of the town. One copy of the treaty was retained by the Arabs and the other by the local governor.

People of 'other religions' who signed a treaty with the Muslims became *dhimmi*s (*ahl al-dhimma*), or people who enjoyed the protection of the Muslim community. Although Zoroastrians, Christians and Jews were not always accorded the same treatment, the conditions of the treaties did not vary greatly according to the religion of the subjugated group. Whereas the surviving texts of treaties contain no indication of the period of validity, historical sources show that it was determined by the extent to which the parties observed the

treaty's provisions. The treaties were valid either until 'the Day of Judgment' (in practical terms, until a change was deemed necessary) or until they were violated by one side and abrogated by the other.

The lands of those who had been subjugated 'by peaceful means' and who had signed a treaty with the Muslims were retained by their former owners. The amount of land tax payable, which depended on the conditions of the treaty and on tradition, was often set at the level determined by the reforms of the Sasanian *shahanshah* Khusrau I (531–578), but could be lower or higher. The high rate of taxation provoked several local uprisings against the conquerors.

First steps towards Islamization

As the military expansion of Islam continued eastwards, the ranks of the Muslim armies were increased by *mawālī* (pl. of *mawlā*, new converts to Islam from Zoroastrianism and other religions). In the early period, conversion to Islam tended to mean recruitment into the conquering army rather than an acceptance of the new religion. Most of the Muslim sources mention examples of active collaboration with the Arab armies by part of the Zoroastrian and Christian communities.

At the battle of al-Qadisiyya in 636 (see above), the Arab armies were joined by the local nobility and local Arabs, 'allies' from Babylonia; there was also a detachment of Dailamites who had accepted Islam. Some Iranian soldiers taken captive at al-Qadisiyya also embraced Islam and supported the Arabs. Historical sources contain a list of the *dihqāns* of small districts of Babylonia who accepted Islam under the caliph ʿUmar (634–644). There were instances of collaboration with the Arabs even before the storming of Ctesiphon, when some of the inhabitants of the Sasanian capital showed the Arab leader where to ford the River Tigris. At the siege of Shushtar in Khuzistan, no fewer than 100 Iranian Muslim horsemen – an entire military unit – fought on the Arab side.⁴²

Towards the end of the period of conquest, there were substantial numbers of *mawālī* of Iranian descent in the Muslim armies: the 5,000-strong army of Ahnaf b. Qais, which fought on the north-eastern frontiers of the former Sasanian Empire, for example, included 1,000 Persian Muslims,⁴³ and the local contingent in the army of Qutaiba b. Muslim, the conqueror of Middle Asia, accounted for at least a sixth of the entire force.⁴⁴

Although the Muslim administration hardly ever resorted to forcible Islamization of the non-Arab population, the number of *mawālī* in Iran rose steadily. Some of the Iranian

⁴² Al-Tabari, 1879–89, Vol. 1, pp. 2562–3.

⁴³ Al-Baladhuri, 1866, p. 407.

⁴⁴ Gibb, 1923, p. 40.

nobles were attracted to Islam as a means of avoiding the *jizya* that placed them on the level of the ordinary tax-payer. Professional soldiers who took up the new religion hoped to become rich on the spoils of war. For enslaved prisoners of war, conversion to Islam meant an opportunity to regain their freedom.

The acceptance of Islam conferred certain privileges on converts, and in theory it gave them equal rights with Muslim Arabs. This was encapsulated in the formula 'rights and obligations in equal measure'. The military nobles who accepted Islam received sums of money or wages from the caliph's coffers; they had the right to choose where they wished to live and held important posts in the caliphate. Iranian Muslim neophytes in the Arab army received their share of booty and land. An additional stimulus to the process of Islamization in Iran was the practice of returning lands taken 'by force of arms' on condition that the land-owner accepted Islam.

The Islamization of Iran during the conquest and in the years following the final collapse of the Sasanian Empire was nevertheless a very slow process and most of the population remained faithful to their old religion and customs. Changes in the ruling ideology had a more appreciable effect in the financial and clerical sectors.

Iranian regional administration in the conquered territories

Many of the nobles in the conquered regions retained their privileges not by accepting Islam, but by acknowledging their political dependence on the Muslim state and paying taxes to the conquerors. Where these conditions were satisfied, the Arab governors allowed the loyal local nobility to retain their lands and did not interfere in their internal affairs. One example is the Arabs' treatment of the Median governor Dinar, of the family of Karen, whose principal duty was to collect taxes for the Arabs from the subject territories. The same task was carried out by the *marzbān* of Azerbaijan and a number of other representatives of the Iranian administration who retained their former posts: Mahak in Istakhr, Kasmud or Kashmir in Herat and Pushang, Mahoe in Sarakhs, Bahiyeh in Nisa and Abivard, Dadoeh in Faryab and Taliqan, and Guraz in Balkh.⁴⁵

The written sources reveal that the local administrations enjoyed a considerable degree of autonomy. The farther a province was from Basra or Kufa, the seats of the caliph's governors, the greater its independence. The local nobility occasionally rebelled against Arab

⁴⁵ Al-Kufi, 1969, Vol. 2, pp. 102, 104, 107.

domination – one such revolt was led by Khurrazad, a noble from Khuzistan, who refused to acknowledge the sovereignty of the caliph ^cAbd al-Malik b. Marwan (685–705).⁴⁶

From the beginning of the reign of the Umayyads (in 661) until the end of the seventh century, Iranian mints issued what are known as Arab-Sasanian drachms. They are distinguished from purely Sasanian coinage by the presence of an Arabic religious inscription on the obverse, and by the fact that the name of the Arab governor or the caliph replaces that of the *shahanshah*. Most of these Arab-Sasanian coins were dated according to the Islamic calendar.

Until the end of the seventh century and the beginning of the eighth – a period marked by the standardization of coinage in the caliphate – it was the local Iranian governors who issued this coinage. Evidence of this is found in the Iranian proper names on various issues of drachms minted in central Iran and in Balkh: Baffarnag in Kerman from the years 62–71 A.H.; Bundad in Ardashir-Khvarreh in 66 and 73; Farrukhzad in Ardashir-Khvarreh in 76 and in Bishapur in 79; Yuwan in Istakhr in 70; and Izdanbud or Gavbud in Balkh in 77. The reform of the caliph ^cAbd al-Malik at the end of the seventh century and the beginning of the eighth accomplished the transition to purely Muslim dirhams, and Arabic became the official language of the administration.⁴⁷

The fact that the names of Iranian governors continued to appear on coins for 30 years after the official date of the Arab conquest of Iran is explained by the growing political unrest within the caliphate, which increased the power of the local administrations. In this unstable situation, both the Umayyads and their opponents sought recognition of their right to supreme power and needed the support of local nobles, who were responsible for the mints. The name of Bundad appears first on the drachms of ^cAbdallah b. al-Zubair, the enemy of the Umayyads, and after his death, on the drachms of the caliph ^cAbd al-Malik.

Tabaristan and Dailam

Before the Arab conquest, the southern Caspian provinces (Gilan, Dailam and Tabaristan) were vassals of the Sasanians. At the time of the conquest, Tabaristan embraced all the territory around the southern Caspian. The first Arab incursions into this almost inaccessible region date from the 640s. Until the mideighth century, however, all the Muslims' attempts to establish themselves there met with fierce resistance from the local population. The Tabaristan campaign under the caliph Mu^cawiya I (661–680) ended in the rout and almost complete annihilation of the Muslim expeditionary force. The Arabs' later attempt

⁴⁶ Al-Baladhuri, 1866, p. 383.

⁴⁷ Gaube, 1973, pp. 2–7.

at taking the province in 716 compelled the *ispahbad* (local governor) to sign a peace treaty involving the annual payment of a sum of dirhams as well as a tribute of goods and troops. Power, however, remained in the hands of the *ispahbads* and Tabaristan subsequently refused to pay the tribute. Around 760 Tabaristan was conquered by the Muslims, as was the mountainous land of Dailam. The *ispahbad* Khurshid was replaced by governors appointed by the ʿAbbasids. Under the caliph al-Maʿmun (813–833), the Arabs, with the assistance of a Tabaristan military leader, took control of the mountainous land of Sharvin. A revolt there in 838 was put down. Tabaristan was finally subjugated in the middle of the ninth century, when the *ispahbad* Karen, son of Shahriyar, accepted Islam.⁴⁸

Zabul, Kabul, Gandhara and Ghur

Arab military action against Zabulistan and other principalities in what is now Afghanistan commenced during the conquest of Seistan. Operating from Seistan, which served as a forward base for their eastern campaigns, the Arabs managed for a time to gain control of Zabul, to the north-east of Seistan; but as soon as the army returned to Zarang (the administrative centre of Seistan), the population ceased to obey their conquerors. Under the caliph Muʿawiya, the military commander ʿAbd al-Rahman b. Samura restored the power of the Arab governor in Seistan and moved east, taking Zabul once again and gaining Rukhkhaj; he reached Kabul, whose ruler was obliged to pay tribute to the Arabs. This state of affairs did not last long, for the king of Kabul soon drove the Arabs from his lands. Another Arab expedition against Kabul in 697–698 was repulsed.

A century later, the Muslims successfully invaded Zabul (in 795) and went on to Kabul. In the subsequent eastern campaign, under the caliph al-Maʿmun, the ruler of Kabul was captured and he then converted to Islam. The Arabs succeeded in gaining a firm hold of the region only in 870, when the founder of the Seistan dynasty of the Saffarids invaded Kabul through Balkh and Bamiyan.⁴⁹

Until the second half of the ninth century the main obstacle encountered by Arab forces in the east was Rukhkhaj, whose rulers (called by the title *zumbīl*) waged protracted wars against the army of the Arab governor of Seistan. The tide of these wars waxed and waned, and the Arabs more than once lost all their territorial gains to the east of Bust; but during periods when anti-Arab resistance weakened, the local population temporarily accepted vassalage to the caliphate, paying tribute to the governor. The rise of the powerful Saffarid state put an end to the Zunbil dynasty and their power.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Walker, 1941, pp. lxi–lxxx.

⁴⁹ Bosworth, 1974, p. 356.

⁵⁰ Bosworth, 1976, p. 559.

The remote region of Ghur, on the upper reaches of the rivers Farah-rud, Hari-rud and Murghab, remained beyond the reach of the Muslims for many decades, during which they were obliged to skirt around it. They only succeeded in establishing themselves there in the tenth century, by which time most of the inhabitants of Ghur had converted to Islam.

The Arabs in Sind

Sind, a principality on the shores of the Arabian Sea and the lower reaches of the Indus, was invaded from the sea by the Muslims in 711. The sea port of Daibul fell first, then several towns on the banks of the Indus, including Arur, the capital. Finally, in 713, the Arabs took Multan and the conquest was complete. The fall of Sind opened the way to the markets of Central Asia.⁵¹

The survival of pre-Islamic civilization

The Arab conquests brought an end to the Sasanian Empire as a political force and yet to some extent they preserved the pre-Islamic Iranian civilization: it underwent no radical change until several centuries later, with the process of Islamization and the emergence of new social and economic conditions. This pattern was repeated in the farflung corners of the former Sasanian Empire and in the neighbouring vassal and independent principalities, which were conquered much later.

Tabaristan, which was separated from Iran by the chain of the Elburz mountains, retained its independence for more than a century after the fall of the Sasanian Empire. It was ruled by the local dynasty, the *ispahbads*, who issued their own coins (a smaller version of Sasanian coinage), remained faithful to Zoroastrianism and wrote in Pahlavi script. The year following the death of Yazdgird III (i.e. 652) marked a new era in the calendar in Tabaristan, which demonstrates the region's loyalty to Sasanian tradition and the continuity of royal succession. The local reckoning of years was used for over 160 years in the mints both of the rulers of Tabaristan and of the ^cAbbasid governors who replaced them. The continuance of local tradition was encouraged by the fact that Arab garrisons were stationed in the main towns of Tabaristan – Amol and Sari – and not in the countryside.⁵²

In central Afghanistan and in areas to the north of the Hindu Kush, ancient Kushan culture continued and the principal religion was Buddhism.⁵³ In Seistan and neighbouring regions, elements of Sasanian culture and the Zoroastrian cult flourished, as is revealed by

⁵¹ Haig, 1934, pp. 433–4.

⁵² Walker, 1941, pp. lxix–lxxx.

⁵³ Ball and Gardin, 1982, Vol. 1, Nos. 99, 100 et seq.; Vol. 2, p. 483.

archaeological data such as the ruins of fortresses and watchtowers, ceramics and coins.⁵⁴ In Bamiyan in the seventh century there were more than 10 Buddhist monasteries and over 1,000 monks (see [Chapter 6](#)). The main Buddhist monastery there was destroyed by the Saffarids in the second half of the ninth century.⁵⁵ Kabul and its surrounding areas also had many buildings devoted to Buddhist and Hindu cults. Further evidence of the strength of pre-Islamic civilizations in the east in the seventh and eighth centuries is afforded by the issues of so-called Arab-Hephthalite coins with legends in Pahlavi, Kufic and Bactrian scripts.⁵⁶

Most of the Arab-Sasanian coins that circulated in the eastern principalities bore local counterstamps with images of simurgs (a monstrous bird of Persian myth, with the power of reasoning and speech), camels, elephants, *tamghas* and other symbols that were typical of east Iranian culture. Some of the coins bore legends in Bactrian script.⁵⁷ Evidence of religious syncretism in the regions to the north of the Hindu Kush is to be found in the silver coinage of the *kaghan* of the Western Türks, whose iconography combines elements of Iranian Zoroastrianism and Indian Shivaism.⁵⁸ The leaders of the autonomous and semi-autonomous eastern principalities retained names in the local toponymy that were known to Arab geographers as late as the tenth to the twelfth century.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, Nos. 145, 206, 270, 369, 900 et seq.; Vol. 2, pp. 484–5.

⁵⁵ Barthold and Allchin, 1960, pp. 1009–10.

⁵⁶ Walker, 1941, pp. lxx–lxxix, 127–9, Pl. xxii, 6–10, xxviii, 1–4.

⁵⁷ Göbl, 1967, Vol. 2, pp. 112–202.

⁵⁸ Harmatta, 1982, pp. 167–80.