The conquest of Khuzistan: a historiographical reassessment*

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In 1889 Ignazio Guidi edited an East Syrian chronicle that covers the late Sasanian and very early Islamic period. Four years later Theodor Nöldeke translated the text into German, dated it to the late seventh century, and argued that its provenance was southern, rather than northern Iraq. Nöldeke’s arguments were accepted, and the text came to be called the Khuzistan Chronicle, which now seems to be the preferred designation in the secondary literature. Little more was said about the text until 1982, when Pierre Nautin argued more vigorously for an idea floating around since Nöldeke’s day, viz. that the text consisted of two unequal parts, the second of which was made up of what Nöldeke called ‘notes’ (Aufzeichnungen). More specifically, Nautin proposed that at least two hands fashioned the work: first a chronicle, who he suggested was Elias of Merv (fl. 7th century); and second, at least one (and perhaps more) redactor/copyist(s), who added a grab-bag collection of material onto the chronicle, which had already lost its beginning; this collection Nautin called an ‘appendix’. Now whether Elias is to be credited with the first,

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4 With perhaps one exception: Fiey’s tentative suggestion that either Daniel bar Mariam or Mūḥaṣṣib of Bēṯ Garmē was ‘la source ecclésiastique’. See Jean Maurice Fiey, ‘Isoyaw le Grand: vie du catholico-nestorian Isoyaw III d’Adiabène (580–659)’, OCP 36 (1970), 46 n. 3.

5 Nöldeke, ‘Chronik’, 2. He also speaks of ‘der wenigsten zwei Generationen später schreibende Redactor’ (ibid., 20 n. 3).

6 On Elias, see Baumstark, Litteratur, 208; Chabot, Littérature, 102.


chronicle, section of the work is not at all clear, but Nautin was certainly correct to emphasize the contrast between this part and what follows; if anything pulls the heterogeneous material together here, it is no longer chronology, but rather an enthusiasm for geography.\(^8\)

For the date of the composition of the chronicle, Nautin argued for a terminus ante quem of 657 or 658, the date of Ishō’yab III’s death;\(^9\) he did not date the ‘appendix’, but much of the evidence cited by Nöldeke to date what he called a ‘letzen Verfassers’ would now apply, apparent allusions to the conquests of Africa and the failed siege of Constantinople taking us to c. 680.\(^10\) Nöldeke’s argument naturally turns on his understanding of these allusions, and in fact there are grounds for arguing that Nautin’s ‘appendix’ was compiled even earlier, perhaps very soon after the completion of the chronicle. For there are no unambiguous references to events in the 660s and 670s: thus, what Nöldeke took to be an allusion to the famous siege of Constantinople of the late 670s (‘Over Constantinople He has not yet given them control’) may rather allude to obscure events in the 650s.\(^11\) But for our purposes it matters little if Nautin’s ‘appendix’ had been compiled by 660, 670, or 680, and I shall stick with Nöldeke’s more conservative dating.\(^12\) The material may have been compiled earlier; there is no reason to think that it was compiled later.

In terms of form and provenance, the ‘appendix’ is composed of a series of discrete accounts, already written in character,\(^13\) and perhaps even more clearly than the chronicle, it reflects local knowledge. It is true that similarities to material that appears in Monophysite sources suggest that at least some of our text’s information about Syria came from a Syrian–Byzantine milieu;\(^14\) but there is precious little of this, and what does come from the West is vague in the extreme: there is no doubt that Syria and Egypt were distant places. Here it is particularly important to note that unlike much of the later Christian tradition that betrays the influence of recognizably Islamic historiographical concerns,\(^15\) the ‘appendix’—here like the chronicle—shows no reliance on the Islamic historical tradition. Entirely absent are features such as Arabic loan words (e.g. rasīlā, fetnā),\(^16\) hijri dating,\(^17\) and interests that reflect a specifically Islamic Sitz im Leben (e.g. Arabian genealogy).\(^18\) Meanwhile, the names of

\(^8\) It includes, inter alia, an account of one of Elias’ miracles, the foundation of several cities (see Nautin, ‘L’auteur’, 307–08), the conquest reports discussed here, Heraclius’ death, and some Arabian topography.

\(^9\) Nautin, ‘L’auteur’, 311; Fiey (‘Īsā’yaw le Grand’) puts his death in the year 659.

\(^10\) See No¨ldeke, ‘Chronik’, 2–3.


\(^12\) The text’s silence may suggest a date earlier than Nöldeke’s; it may also reflect the compiler’s project, since he makes no attempt to be thorough or comprehensive, and is apparently concerned to cobble together the stray piece of information that appeals to his interest in geography.

\(^13\) See Nöldeke, ‘Chronik’, 2.

\(^14\) See below, n. 205.

\(^15\) See, for example, Lawrence I. Conrad, ‘Theophanes and the Arabic historical tradition: some indications of intercultural transmission’, BP 15 (1990), 1–44.

\(^16\) See the examples adduced in Andrew Palmer, The seventh century in the West-Syrian chronicles (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1993), 49 n. 162, 56 n. 173 (rasīlā); and see also the Zuqnin Chronicle, IV, ed. and trans. J.-B. Chabot under the erroneous title of Chronique de Denys de Tell Mahé (Paris: Emile Bouillon, 1895, s.v. 967 (fetnā)).

\(^17\) Such as that in the (West Syrian) Chronicle of 1234; see Jean Maurice Fiey’s introduction to the French translation of the second volume, Anonymi auctoris chronicon ad annum Christi 1224 pertinens, II (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1974, CSCO 354, Scr. syri 154); also in the East Syrian Opus chronologicum by Elijah of Nisibis (wr. 410/1019), ed. E. W. Brooks (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1910), 134, where Abū Mūsā al-Āṣhā‘ī (whose name is given in full) is said to have conquered Bēt Hūrzayē in art 22.

\(^18\) Such as we have in Theophanes (d. 818); noted by Fred M. Donner, The Early Islamic conquests (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 144. The matter is discussed fully in Conrad, ‘Theophanes’, 11–16.
Abū Mūsā [al-Ashʿārī], Khālid [ibn al-Walīd], and Saʿd ibn [Abī] Waqqaṣ appear in fragmentary form, the Persian general Hormizdān is called ‘the Mede’, and such details as do exist—particularly the names and offices of local church notables—are as hard to reconcile with Islamic historiographical concerns as they are natural in a local Nestorian Christian milieu.

It is in the midst of the broadly heterogeneous material in the ‘appendix’ that the reader comes across the subject of this article: a vivid and detailed account of the conquest of Bēt Hūzayyē (Ar. Khūzistān/al-Ahwāz). Although the Khūzistān Chronicle has been read several times with an eye towards discerning a Christian reaction to early Islam in general, it has not yet been brought to bear systematically on any of the vexing historical and historiographical problems that plague students of the conquests. Of course, Nöldeke did address some of these problems in his translation, but his marginalia are spotty and now show their age; in any case, he apparently sought only to elucidate the recently available Syriac text. The source has also been put to use in a summary of the campaigns of Khālid ibn al-Walīd, but there its significance lay in its silence about Khālid’s presence in Iraq, rather than in what it does say about the Muslim presence in Khūzistān. As far as the conquest is concerned, Islamicists from Wellhausen to Caetani to Donner have relied instead on the Arabic sources, and these being generally so intractable, and Islamicists generally so conservative, scholarship has hardly moved at all. In fact, inasmuch as it has moved, our knowledge has contracted; and it is impossible to find fault with Donner’s sensible view that we now must be content with ‘a sequence of events and with the general understanding that the conquest of southern Iraq took place between AD 635 and 642. To seek greater chronological precision is to demand more of the sources than they can reasonably be expected to provide’.

To break the logjam we must leave the Islamic tradition. In what follows I shall do so, putting the long-neglected Syriac text to work by translating and commenting on its description of how several cities in Khūzistān fell to the Arabs. My interests are primarily historiographical, and thoroughly conventional at that: I am concerned with the old-fashioned—if still unresolved—question of how faithfully our Islamic sources record conquest history. Of course it is impossible to know if the events described by our anonymous Syriac author actually took place as he describes them. We cannot pretend that literary representation, particularly of this variety, is a disinterested witness to events past, and early sources are not necessarily more accurate than later objective’ source. Each

20 For example, the material on the conquest of Khūzistān attributed to Sayf ibn ‘Umar (d. 180/796), and preserved in al-Tabari (wr. 303/915), was not yet available to Nöldeke.
23 Donner, Conquests, 217.
24 The ‘appendix’ also has something to say about matters in Syria and Egypt, which I have translated in a brief appendix of my own; it follows below.
25 The point hardly needs demonstration, but cf. John Wansbrough, The sectarian milieu: content and composition of Islamic salvation history (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 119: ‘...it ought to be clear that there can be no question of a neutral or “objective” source. Each witness, regardless of its confessional alignment, exhibits a similar, if not altogether identical, concern to understand the theodicy’. 
ones. But if we shall never know exactly what happened in Khūzistān in the 640s and 650s, our Syriac source preserves a very early understanding of what happened, and in so doing it provides an invaluable control for the later Islamic tradition. Early, naive, and historiographically independent of Islamic sources, it allows us to identify and occasionally disentangle strands of tradition that are manifestly late and polemically conditioned from other, older, strands that preserve authentically early views of conquest history.

The Syriac account

The relevant account may be translated as follows. I have broken the text into paragraphs for the sake of clarity.

At the time of which we have been speaking (beh den b-hanâ zabnû d-men l'el enarman), when the Arabs (tayyârê) conquered all the lands of the Persians and Byzantines, they also entered and conquered all the fortified towns, that is, Bêt Lapašt (Ar. Jundaysâbûrû), Karka d-Ledân, and Shûshân, the citadel. There remained only Shûsh (Ar. al-Sûs) and Shûshtrâ (Ar. Tustar), which were very strong, while of all the Persians none remained to resist the Arabs except king Yazdgard and one of his commanders (had men rabbay haylawâteh), whose name was Hormûz-dân the Mede, who gathered troops and held Shûsh and Shûshtrâ. This Shûshtrâ is very extensive and strong, because of the mighty rivers and canals that surround it on every side like moats. One of these was called Ardashirâgân, after Ardashîr who dug it; another, which crossed it, was called Shamîrâm, after the queen; and another, Dârayagân, after Darius. The largest of all of them was a mighty torrent, which flowed down from the northern mountains.

26 It is regrettable that this point is usually made apologetically, in defence of late evidence; see K. Lawson Younger, Ancient conquest accounts: a study in ancient Near Eastern and biblical history writing (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 249–53.
27 The passage begins on 35:20/29:30 and ends at 37:14/31:2.
28 As Noldêke remarked (‘Chronik’, 41 n. 4) this passage seems to allude to an earlier one, which begins on 30:23/26:13: ‘Then God brought the sons of Ismaîl against them, [innumerable] like sand on the sea shore. Muḥammad was their leader (mdâhbrâmu). Neither walls, gates, armor, or shields withheld them, and they took control over all of the land of the Persians. Yazdgard sent countless armies against them, but the Arabs (tayyârê) defeated them all; they even killed Rustam. Yazdgard shut himself up inside the walls of Mahōzê (i.e. Seleucia-Ctesiphon), but eventually escaped by fleeing. He came to the lands of the Hûzayû and of the Marînayû. There he ended his life. The Arabs took control of Mahōzê and all of its lands. They also came to the Byzantine lands, and they plundered and ravaged all of the lands of Syria. Heraclius, the king of the Byzantines, sent armies against them, but the Arabs killed more than 100,000 of them.’
31 As Noldêke comments (‘Chronik’, 42 n. 2), the phrase is biblical, but the author clearly does not have in mind Shûsh (Susa, al-Sûs), which presently follows.
32 i.e. Yazdgird III (r. 632–51).
33 On the name, see Ferdinand Justi, Iranisches Namenbuch (Marburg: N. G. Elwert’sche Verlagbuchhandlung, 1895), 10. The Arabic form preferred is generally al-Hurrûmûzânîn, with the important exception of Ibn A’thâm (wr. 204/819–20), whose reading (H-r-m-z-d-z-a-ni) comes closest to the Syriac. On the date and transmission history of Ibn A’thâm’s history, several recensions of which have survived—at least in part—to modern times, see Lawrence I. Conrad, Ibn A’thâm and his history (Winona Lake, IN: American Oriental Society, forthcoming).
Then (haydēn) an Arab commander known as Abū Mūsā attacked Hormizdān the Mede. He (Abū Mūsā) had built al-BAṣrā as a settlement (j-mawţāḥbān) for the Arabs, where the Tigris flows into the great ocean, between the cultivated land and the desert, just as Sa’d bar Waqqāṣ had built the city of ‘Aqūlā as another settlement for the Arabs, which was named Kūfā, after the bend of the Euphrates. But when Abū Mūsā went to attack Hormizdān, this Hormizdān devised stratagems in order to prevent them (the Arabs) from engaging him, until he gathered an army. He wrote to Abū Mūsā that he (Abū Mūsā) should stop taking captives and making war, and that he (Hormizdān) would send whom whatever tribute (madātā) they imposed on him. Thus it remained for two years.

Trusting his walls, Hormizdān then broke the truce (shayynā) between them, and killed the men who had been ambassadors between them, one of whom was George, the bishop of Ulay. He [also] imprisoned Abraham, the metropolitan of Furāt. He [then] sent many armies against the Arabs, but they defeated them all. The Arabs rushed [forward], lay siege to Shūsh, took it after a few days, and killed all of the nobles (prēshē) in it. They seized the house that is called the ‘House of Mār Daniel’, and took the treasure there enclosed, which had been kept there on the kings’ orders since the days of Darius and Cyrus. They also broke open and made off with a silver coffin, in which a mumified corpse was laid; many said it was Daniel’s, but others [claimed] that it was Darius.

They also lay siege to Shūshtrā, and fought for two years to take it. Then a man from Qatār who was living there befriended a man who had a house on the walls, and the two of them conspired together. They went out to the Arabs and told them: ‘If you give us a third of the spoil of the city, we will let you into it’. They came to an agreement, dug tunnels under the walls, and let in the Arabs, who [thus] captured Shūshtrā. They shed blood there as if it were water. They killed the exegete of the city and the bishop of Hormizdān dashār (Ar. Sūq al-Ahvāz), along with the students, priests, and deacons, whose blood they shed in the holy sanctuary. They took Hormizdān alive.

The passage translated appears to be a discrete unit. With a sure command of detail, and paced by a series of adverbs and adverbial phrases that link the episodes temporally and logically, the account generates a sense of movement that is almost entirely lacking in other parts of the ‘appendix’. Elsewhere information is imparted: here a coherent story is told. Since our compiler generally shows little if any historical method, we can assume that the account came to him in this form; he copied it, just as he copied the chronicle before it. Its appeal presumably lay in the quality of its narrative, which vividly

35 Metkne; usually merely ‘nicknamed’, but here it precisely expresses the Arabic kunya.
36 Apparently located south of al-Hira; see Morony, Iraq, 152; Donner, Conquests, 329 n. 66.
37 That is, Furāt d-Maysān, which was apparently located opposite the medieval site of al-BAṣrā; see Morony, Iraq, 159.
38 Noldeke (‘Chronik’, 22, n. 2) points out that this was understood broadly: ‘Qatār umfasst aber bei diesen Syrern alle Länder der nordöstlichen Arabiens, wo damals viele nestorianische Christen wohnten’. The point, as I argue below, is Nestorian church politics.
39 On Hormizdān dashār, see Fiey, ‘Elam…(suite)’, 130–34.
41 It is particularly worth noting that no effort has been made to relate Khālid’s march to Syria, as portrayed in the ‘appendix’, to the chronicler’s earlier allusion to al-Yarmūk (on which see below).
describes the terrible fate of a Nestorian heartland; it may also have appealed to the copyist’s (or copyists’) interest in geography and topography. Whatever its ultimate provenance, it is more detailed than anything available to Elias of Merv,42 or, for that matter, anything else to be written in either West or East Syriac.

What the Syriac account cannot tell us

In what follows I shall argue that the ‘appendix’ to the Khūzistān Chronicle can provide enough corroboration for accounts in the Islamic tradition that we must posit the continuous transmission of historical material within the latter. In this case, some early material clearly did survive the hazardous passage from witness to tradent to historian, a passage of approximately 150–200 years. The degree to which those who initially transmitted and compiled the material were concerned with what we would consider historiographical issues—particularly problems of sequence and time—is considerably harder to discern, and although we shall meet these problems throughout, it is best if we address two at the start.

First, since our source begins with the entrance of Abū Mūsā al-Ash’arī, it sheds no light on the events that the Islamic tradition describes as having taken place before his appearance in Khūzistān: of cities that are said to have entered into treaties, which they would soon break, and of ‘Utba ibn Ghazwān and al-Mughīra ibn Shu‘ba, the two commanders who are said to have preceded Abū Mūsā on the front, we hear nothing.43 What our source does say, however, is that all but four of the ‘fortified towns’ had been taken before Abū Mūsā arrived on the scene; and thus there is probably something to the Islamic accounts that attribute some role to ‘Utba and al-Mughīra.44 Of course, whether Abū Mūsā’s victories can be considered the last phase of a continuous series of campaigns that began with ‘Utba is altogether a different question, and one that the source does not answer: the world of Medinan state building and caliphal politics is unknown to our Syriac source. Our Syriac compiler was apparently concerned only to record the outlines of the Sasanian defeat, rather than a detailed history of the Muslim victory; and even assuming that he had heard of such earlier battles as there were, we can hardly expect him to have connected them to those led by Abū Mūsā. He records what the Islamic tradition generally considers the final phase of the conquest of Khūzistān, probably for the simple reason that Abū Mūsā’s campaigns were indeed decisive.

Although Syriac accounts can occasionally provide invaluable help in solving dating problems,45 this one cannot; here we arrive at the second principal limitation of our source. An assortment of topics,46 the ‘appendix’ can only yield a relative dating, and one that happens to be particularly weak to boot. The beginning of the passage suggests that the start of the conquest

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43 For summaries of these events, see the works cited above, n. 22.
44 Here it is tempting to infer from the presence of the bishop of Hormīzadashīr in Tustar that his city had already fallen.
45 Particularly for events in Syria and Palestine, where the Christian testimony is most dense; the earliest example is Theodor Nöldeke, ‘Zur Geschichte der Araber im 1. Jahrhundert d.H. aus syrischen Quellen’, ZDMG 29 (1875), 76–98.
46 In Nautin’s words (L’auteur’, 304), ‘un appendice fait de morceaux décousus’.
of Khūzistān was roughly contemporaneous with, or perhaps even followed, that of Iraq and Syria: ‘At the time of which we have been speaking, when the Arabs conquered all the lands of the Persians and Byzantines, they also entered and conquered all the fortified towns…’. But after recording Abū Mūsā’s campaigns, it then turns to Khālid ibn al-Walid’s conquest of Syria, which it says followed those of Abū Mūsā: ‘Afterwards (bātarkēn) a man from the Arabs named Kāled came and went to the West, and took the lands and towns as far as ‘Arab’. Now the problem can be solved by combining the second of these two passages, which has the virtue of more clearly asserting a sequence of events; and since the remarks that follow seem to allude to the battle of al-Yarmūk, we can actually generate a terminus ante quem of late August of 636/Rajab of AH 15 for the end of Abū Mūsā’s campaigns. That this dating is at severe variance with the consensus of the Islamic sources might cause some concern, particularly because it would force a redating of the founding of al-Baṣra; but it is far from fatal, the Islamic tradition containing some aberrant dating schemes of its own. A report in the Kitāb al-kharāj of Abū Yūsuf (d. 182/798), for example, can be handled in such a way so as to produce the dating of c. AH 15 or 16 for the fall of Tustar.

But there are too many problems to overcome. For one thing the sequence of conquests would run afoot of another, earlier, non-Islamic source. For another, it is not at all clear that the author of the passages translated above can also be credited with the passage translated below; and since the final reductor/editor manifests so little interest in chronology, we cannot use the latter to date material in the former without establishing single authorship. Moreover, even if we could establish a single author, his acquaintance with events in Syria pales in comparison with his knowledge of his (apparently) native Bēt Ḥūzāyē; and it would be nothing if not reckless to use his vague and secondhand material concerning the West to date his detailed account of local events. Finally, it may be that the crucial adverb (bātarkēn)—the hinge upon which the proposed dating would swing—has little temporal significance, and instead marks nothing more than a narrative transition.

For the whole passage, see the Appendix below.


The earliest date for operations in Khūzistān seems to be the consensus report (qālū, ‘they said’) that begins al-Balādhuri’s section on al-Ahwāz; but here it is al-Mughira ibn Shu’ba who raids Sīg al-Ahwāz in late 15 or early 16/636 or 637; see al-Balādhuri (d. 729/942), Futūḥ al-baladān, ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1866), 376. Khālid ibn Khayyāt (d. 240/854), Taʾrīkh, ed. Suhaŷl Zakkar (Damascus: Wizārat al-thaqāfa wa-l-siyāḥa wa-l-irshād al-qawmī, 1967), I, 105, puts this raid in AH 16. The latest date is in the severely telescoped account in al-Ya’qūbī (d. 284/897), Historiae, ed. M. T. Houtsma (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1883), II, 180, where Abū Mūsā’s conquest of al-Ahwāz and Īṣṭakhr is put in AH 23.

The report states that Abū Mūsā conquered Tustar, Iṣfāhān, Mihrājanqadhaq, and Nihāwān (?) while Sa’d ibn Abī Waqqās was laying siege to al-Madā’in; see Abū Yūsuf, Kitāb al-kharāj (Cairo: al-Matba’ā al-salafīya, AH 1352), 60. The date for the final capitulation of al-Madā’in is usually given as 16/637; see al-Tabarī, Taʾrīkh al-rusul wa-l-ma’alūk, ed. M. J. de Goeje et al. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1879–1901), I, 2431–32. But its siege may have been very protracted; al-Dinawari (d. 282/893), Al-akhbār al-tiwāl, ed. Vladimir Guiggass and Ignatius Kratchkovsky (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1888–1912), 133, puts it at 28 months. See also al-Balādhuri, Futūḥ, 262–64; Yaqūt (d. 626/1229), Muʿjam al-baladān, ed. Ferdinand Wüstenfeld (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1866–73), I, 768, which draws on al-Balādhuri, as well as on a chronology that dates the conquest to AH 15.


In sum, nothing in the 'appendix' can yield a precise date for the conquest of the south. Of course this can also be restated in more positive terms: nothing in the ‘appendix’ can throw serious doubt on a reconstruction that is based on reading the Islamic tradition, and that dates the fall of Khūzistān after that of al-Madā’in, perhaps in AH 22 or 23.  

What the Syriac account can tell us

If the text cannot answer all of our questions, it can shed a direct and bright light on several others. It is to these questions that I shall now turn.

The conquest of Jundaysābūr

The first problem concerns the fall of Jundaysābūr. The sources familiar to al-Ṭabarī (wr. 303/915) and al-Baladhurī (d. 279/892) held that the definitive conquest of Jundaysābūr followed that of Tustar and al-Sūs; this is the sequence that Donner describes.  

But there were differing views: a tradition preserved by Khalīfā ibn Khayyāt (d. 240/854), for example, holds that Jundaysābūr fell before Tustar,  

and this is clearly what our Syriac authority has in mind as well. Considering that the conquest of Jundaysābūr does not seem to have been a principal concern for most of our Muslim authorities, and considering too that our Syriac source is not only local, but also that Jundaysābūr was the metropolitan centre of Nestorian Bēt Hūzāyē, one might side with Khalīfā. In this case, as in others, consensus is apparently no guarantee of accuracy. Meanwhile, what the Syriac source has to say about the canal-dominated topography of Tustar is very much in line with how the city is described in many conquest accounts in the Islamic tradition.  

The point to be emphasized here is a broader agreement between the Islamic tradition and our Syriac source: al-Sūs and Tustar were among the last cities to hold out in Khūzistān, falling definitively only after Abū Mūsā appeared on the scene, and al-Hurmuza, sent by Yazdagīrd, played a crucial role in the Sasanian defence.

Al-Ǧaṣrā, al-Ǧufa, and the problem of conquest participation

Our Syriac testimony on the founding of al-Ǧaṣrā and al-Ǧufa is one of the earliest datable accounts we possess. It is both familiar (the two are established as ‘settlements’ for the Arabs) and unfamiliar (Abū Mūsā al-Abš’ārī, rather than ‘Utb ibn Ghazwān, being given credit for founding al-Ǧaṣrā). Another,

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54 Cf. Donner, Conquests, 217.  
55 Al-Ṭabarī, Tārīḫ, I, 2567; al-Baladhurī, Futūḥ, 382; Donner, Conquests, 216.  
56 Khalīfā ibn Khayyāt, Tārīḫ, I, 138.  
57 For a detailed discussion, see Fiey, ‘L’Elam’, 227–67.  
59 On al-Ǧaṣrā, see Charles Pellat, art. ‘al-Ǧaṣrā’ in EI², I (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960), 1085a (which puts the conquest in AH 17); Sulṭān Ahmad al-ʿAbbās, Al-Tanzūnāt al-ṣiḥātīyya wa-l-qiyasīyya fī l-Ǧaṣrā fī l-qarn al-awwal al-hijrī (Baghdad: Matba‘at al-ma‘ārif, 1953), 25–6 (perhaps as early as AH 14 or 16).
and admittedly much later, Christian source also credits Abū Mūsā with al-Baṣra, but the evidence is more enticing than clinching.

As far as the conquest is concerned, the Islamic tradition generally has Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī play a dual role. First, he is said to effect the definitive conquest of cities, such as Sūq al-Ahwāz, that had reneged on earlier treaties; and second, he is given a prominent role in the two victories of al-Sūs and Tustar, which broke the back of the Sasanian defence. As we have already seen, on the first of these our Syriac source can offer only silence, which is particularly frustrating since so many cities are said to have reneged on earlier agreements. In the case of Tustar we have another instance of this, but because our Syriac source does have something to say here, our conclusions perhaps have more force there. On the second problem—Abū Mūsā’s role in the Muslim armies—our Syriac source can suggest that credit for the conquest of al-Sūs and Tustar indeed does belong to Abū Mūsā, rather than to other candidates favoured by our Muslim authorities, particularly Abū Sabra, whom Sayf ibn ʿUmar (d. 180/796) gives pride of place in the army that besieged Tustar.

It is not just the silence of our Syriac source that makes Abū Sabra’s role at Tustar a problem. He is also curiously absent in the very battle scene that Sayf himself describes: it is at Abū Mūsā’s feet, rather than Abū Sabra’s, that the arrow shot from a traitor’s bow dramatically lands, thus turning the tide of the battle. It is true that his absence on the field could be argued away on the grounds that the conquest tradition occasionally distinguishes between a commander who has nominal authority over a campaign, and a sub-commander, sometimes called the amīr al-qīṭāl, or ‘battle commander’, who leads the army into combat, and who has authority to enter into agreements on his superior’s behalf. But no such distinction is made at Tustar, and other sources are as consistent in ignoring Abū Sabra as they are on insisting on the command of Abū Mūsā.

They ignore Abū Sabra’s role in Tustar for the simple reason that they ignore him otherwise: Sayf is apparently alone in having him briefly hold the governorship of al-Baṣra after ʿUṭba ibn Ghazwān and before al-Mughīra ibn Shuʿba. These then are the terms in which we can understand Abū Sabra’s cameo appearance in Sayf’s account, and the second reason why we should reject it. For it apparently comes not from an authentic memory of the events in question, but rather was generated by a view widely held by conquest authorities that the governorship of al-Baṣra and the leadership of the Khūzistān campaigns were one and the same. In the case of Abū Mūsā,

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60 Bar Hebraeus (d. 1286), Taʾrīkh mukhtasar al-dawal, ed. Antoine Saḥānī (Beirut: Imprimerie catholique, 1890), 174, knows ‘ʿUṭba and al-Mughīra ibn Shuʿba only as military commanders; the laying out of the khītār, the building of manāzil and the congregational mosque, Arab settlement—all these are credited to Abū Mūsā. Al-Yaʿqūbī (Historiae, II, 163) explicitly credits ʿUṭba with the ikhtīṣāt of the site.
61 See below.
62 Al-Ṭabarī, Taʾrīkh, I, 2553–6.
63 Ibid., I, 2554.
64 Thus Suhayl ibn ʿAd to ibid., I, 2506–7.
65 Thus tribesmen boast that they fought alongside Abū Mūsā: see Ibn Abī Shayba (d. 235/849), Al-Maṣūmāt, ed. Saʿīd al-Lahlām (Beirut: Dar al-fikr, 1989), VIII, 17; on p. 32 Abū Mūsā is explicitly identified as the amīr al-jaysh. Al-Qummī (Ṭarīkh-i Qummī, 295) puts Abū ʿUbayda’s and Ibn Ishaq’s reports under the rubric dhikr-i faṭḥ-i Abū Mūsā Asḥārī.
66 Al-Ṭabarī, Taʾrīkh, I, 2498, 2850–51.
67 Note that al-Baladhurī’s first report (Furūḥ, 376: qūlū), which outlines the overall sequence of events, conspicuously and explicitly connects the conquest of al-Ahwāz with the administration of al-Baṣra. They reported: al-Mughīra ibn Shuʿba raided Sūq al-Ahwāz during his governorship when ʿUṭba ibn Ghazwān was removed from al-Baṣra at the end of the year 15 or the beginning of the year 16...then Abū Mūsā raided it when ‘Umar appointed him governor of al-Baṣra after al-Mughīra.
where we have a broad Islamic consensus that is corroborated by our Syriac source, there is good reason to think that the view is correct: Abū Mūsā founded al-Baṣra and did play a starring role in the conquest of Khūzistān. In the case of Abū Sabra we have only Sayf.

Abū Sabra’s obscurity may have had narrative advantages for Sayf, who has him oversee what is presented as two separate armies, one Baṣran and one Kuflan.68 These armies pose problems of their own. Now because our Syriac source implies that Abū Mūsā came to Khūzistān from al-Baṣra, we can put some stock in the Islamic accounts that speak of Baṣran armies as well.69 Kuflan participation in the conquest of the south is altogether harder to confirm, however. As Donner has noted,70 the introduction of reinforcements into the Khūzistān campaign—of which the Kuflans under al-Nu’mān ibn al-Muqarrin or ‘Amār ibn Yāsir figure very prominently—was a matter of some controversy. In what follows I shall offer some suggestions why.

The conquest of Khūzistān

At issue was the region’s revenues, since it was by claiming conquest experience that one argued one’s share; in other words, the conquest record was influenced by post-conquest politics.71 Sayf preserves an account that has al-Ahnaf ibn Qays voicing Baṣran grievances vis-à-vis the Kuflans soon after the conquest of Sūq al-Ahwāz, and to judge by ‘Umar’s response, his argument was convincing: in addition to doling out to the Baṣrans former Sasanian crown land, ‘Umar is said to have increased the number of Baṣrans receiving 2,000 dirhams by including among them all those who had fought at (Sūq) al-Ahwāz.72 The Baṣrans and Kuflans disputed about Tustar in particular. The categorical assertion that Tustar belongs to the Baṣrans is warning enough that administrative geography was controversial,73 and echoes of the controversy can be heard even as late as Yāqūt’s time, when some apparently claimed that Tustar belonged to al-Ahwāz, while others held that it belonged to al-Baṣra. Yāqūt also tells of a heated exchange between the two parties that took place before ‘Umar, each claiming Tustar as their own.74 Ibn A’tham al-Kufī has a much longer version of this, or a similar, scene.

The Baṣrans and Kuflans came to argue, the Baṣrans saying: ‘The conquest is ours!’ and the Kuflans saying: ‘No, the conquest is ours!’ So they argued about it to the point that something truly disagreeable almost happened between them.75

70 See Donner, Conquests, 342 n. 229.
74 Yāqūt, Muṣam al-balāḏīn, I, 849 (both accounts).
75 Ibn Aʾtham, Futūḥ, II, 27. Cf. the dispute between a Kufla and a Syrian, where the former crowns about his townsmen’s victories: ‘We were the victors at the battle of al-Qudaysa and the battle of such-and-such’ (nahu asḥab yawm al-Qudaysa wa-yawm khādhā wa-kāthā...), and the latter about his townsmen’s victories (including al-Yarmūk), in Ibn Abī Shayba, Masʿūnaf, VIII, 17.
The solution that ‘Umar is here given to provide holds that although the conquest is indeed to be credited to the Başrans, its benefits accrue to Başrans and Kufans alike.  

‘Umar’s view that conquest revenues were to be distributed to the Başrans and Kufans is more fully described by Ibn A’tham. Here Abü Müsä al-Atsh’ārī writes to the caliph, requesting reinforcements for the upcoming battle at Tustar; the caliph responds by dispatching a Kufan commander. ‘Ammār ibn Yaṣir. As in other reports, the operative terms (istamadda, āmadda) are topological, in this case probably employed not only to emphasize the role of the caliph in conquest decision making, but also to bring Kufan troops into a picture that had been dominated by Başrans. ‘Ammār ibn Yaṣir is then given to describe the contents of the letter from ‘Umar: ‘He (the caliph) is ordering me to march to Abū Müsä al-Atsh’ārī to come to the aid of our believing brethren from al- Başra’ (li-nūṣrat ʾikhwānīn al-ma’imin min ahl al- Başra). Then, after the battle, ‘Umar passes judgement on the ensuing controversy.

Tustar is [to be considered] among the conquests (maḥgzāt) of the Başrans even though they were aided by their brethren from among the Kufans (innamā nūṣrir bi-ʾikhwānin min ahl al-Kufa). The same thing goes for the Kufans: if they make raids in their marches (thughār), and the Başrans come to their aid, there is no harm [done to their claim] (lam yakun bi-dhālika ba’s). For according to the book of God, victory belongs to [all] the believers; God has made [all] the believers brethren. The conquest is the Başrans’, but the Kufans are their equals in the rewards and spoils (shurakāʾ uḥum ʿfi l-ajr wa-l-ghanīma). Beware the discords inspired by Satan!

A post-conquest opinion on the division of spoils—i.e. that merely by assisting (nūṣra) the Başrans, the Kufans had earned a full share—is thus detectable in a tradition that purports to describe the conquest itself. That precisely this issue was controversial is made clear elsewhere, in a work that is explicitly legal in character. The late and polemical character of the account explains ‘Umar’s eirenic tone: all the rivalry that we might expect of campaigning armies, and of which we have clear echoes in the post-conquest disputes, is stifled by a unitary and providential view of conquest history.

Post-conquest disputes influenced the historical record in other ways as well. If some attributed to ‘Umar the view that the Başrans and Kufans were to share equally in the spoils, others thought differently. Thus Yaqūt preserves an echo of another view, which held that ‘Umar granted the revenues of Tustar to the Başrans rather than to the Kufans, on the grounds that it was closer to al- Başra than it was to Kufa. In one of the titles attributed to al-Madāʾīnī

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76 Ibn A’tham, Futūḥ, II, 27.
77 Al-Ṭabarī, Taʾrīkh, I, 2534.
79 Ibn A’tham, Futūḥ, II, 10.
80 Ibid. II, 27.
81 Cf. Sūrat al-Anfāl (8), v. 74; Sūrat al-Rūm (30), v. 47; Sūrat al-Hujuratāt (49), v. 10.
82 The vocabulary remains qurānic: see, in particular, Sūrat al-Nisāʾ (4), v. 12; Sūrat Yūsuf (12), v. 100; Sūrat al-Rūm (30), v. 28.
84 One can only wonder about the contents of the Fakhr ʾal-ʾKāfaʾ ala l- Başra by al-Waqqādī (d. 207/823), and the Muḥakkarat ahl al- Başra wa-aḥl al-ʾKāfa by al-Madāʾīnī (d. 228/842); on which see Ibn al-Nadim, Fihrist, 100, 104. Cf. also al-Yaʿqūbī, Kitāb al-buldān, ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1885: BGA 7), 167–73.
(d. 228/842), the Khabar al-Basra wa-futūhā wa-futūh mā yuqāribuhā min Dahistān wa-l-Ahwāz wa-Masābdhān wa-ghayr dhālika,86 we may have a reconstruction of conquest history according to this principle.

Hinds has shown how Basran participation in the initial conquest of Fārs could be exaggerated by our sources.87 Given the problems surrounding the Kūfīs in Khūzistān, those determined to reconstruct history could do worse than to rethink the Kūfīs’ role here.

The question of treaties

Things are perhaps only slightly less thorny when it comes to what our Syriac source calls a ‘truce’ (shaynā). That the campaigns in Khūzistān were interrupted by a short-lived peace is clear enough; the problem is that the one promising account we have in the Islamic tradition, which is Sayf’s, identifies al-Hurmuza and ‘Utba ibn Ghazwān, rather than al-Hurmuza and Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī, as the parties concerned.88

In fact, Sayf knew of two such agreements. Al-Hurmuza is first said to have reached a sull agreement with ‘Utba at Sūq al-Ahwāz, after he had heard of the losses of Manādhir and Nahr Tīrā to Muslim forces:

When the [Muslim] fighting force (al-qawm) moved against al-Hurmuza and encamped near him in al-Ahwāz, he saw that he lacked the force to do battle. So he requested a sull. They (the Muslims) then wrote to ‘Utba about the matter, requesting his instructions. Al-Hurmuza wrote to him, and ‘Utba agreed to the offer on the following terms: [al-Hurmuza would retain] all of al-Ahwāz and Miḥrajanqadhaq, except Nahr Tīrā, Manādhir, and that part of Sūq al-Ahwāz that they (the Muslims) had overrun. What we have liberated will not be returned to them.

A dispute is then said to have arisen concerning the borders between al-Hurmuza’s territory and that of the Muslims; in the aftermath, al-Hurmuza ‘reneged (kafara), withheld what he had accepted,89 enrolled Kurds (in this army), and so his army grew strong’.90 He then took to the field, was defeated at Sūq al-Ahwāz, and eventually fled to Ṣabīḥ. There he reached a second sull, and once again ‘Umar is given to impose conditions: ‘Umar ordered him (‘Utba) to accept [al-Hurmuza’s offer], on the following terms: that the land not conquered, i.e. Tustar, al-Su, Jundaysābūr, al-Bunyān, and Miḥrajanqadhaq [would come under Muslim authority]. Al-Hurmuza agreed to the terms, which are now described in more detail:

The commanders of the Ahwāz campaign took responsibility for what was assigned to them, and al-Hurmuza for his sull, [the latter] levying taxes for them, and [the former] protecting him.91 If the Kurds of Fārs raided him, they would come to his aid and defend him.92

88 Al-Ṭabarī, Taʾrīkh, I, 2538–42.
89 i.e. what he had agreed to yield in tribute? The Arabic text is wa-mama’a mā qabilahu.
90 Al-Ṭabarī, Taʾrīkh, I, 2540.
91 yannā ṣuḥala; one might also read yuʿāwinahum, ‘and he (al-Hurmuza) offering aid to them’.
92 Al-Ṭabarī, Taʾrīkh, I, 2543.
This sulh fared no better than the first: after two Muslim forces were sent into al-Ahwáz, one of which was led by Abû Mûsâ, al-Hurmuza engaged al-Nu'mân ibn al-Muqarrin, was defeated, and fled to Tustar.93

Once again, one can be cheered by the common ground: al-Hurmuza seems to have entered into some kind of agreement with the Muslims, which perhaps stipulated an exchange of tribute for recognition of local authority, and during which al-Hurmuza reinforced his armies. Although its exact timing escapes us, it must have been reached during, or soon after, the fall of al-Ahwáz. But it is difficult to say much more. The close similarities between Sayf's two agreements might be taken to suggest either that the 'appendix' conflated the two, or that Sayf (or his sources) had so heavily elaborated a single truce account that out of its precipitate emerged two separate accounts. A tentative argument might be made in favour of Sayf's second treaty. For whereas the two, or that Sayf (or his sources) had so heavily elaborated a single truce agreements might be taken to suggest either that the

Al-Süs: leadership, Asäwira, and Daniel

Since our Syriac source places Hormizdân at both Shûsh and Shûshtrâ, and describes his capture in the latter, we are to infer that it fell after Shûsh. Donner argues the opposite, putting al-Süs after Tustar.95 On this sequence no authority is cited, but it is implicit in Sayf in al-Tabari,96 and explicit in al-Dinawari (d. 282/891).97 There appears to have been some disagreement on the matter, however. Al-Tabari freely volunteers that there was no consensus about the conquest of al-Süs,98 al-Balâdhûrî discusses Tustar after al-Süs,99 and Ibn al-Atham, as well as Abû `Ubayda (d. 211/826) and Ibn Ishâq (d. 151/761, as preserved by al-Qummî, d. 805/1402), clearly put the fall of al-Süs before that of Tustar.100 This was Caetani's view,101 and it is vindicated by our Syriac source.

In the precise course of the conquest of al-Süs the Islamic sources evince little interest. A failed ruse attempted by al-Süs's (anonymous) marzbân is featured in one of al-Balâdhûrî's accounts, according to which an amîn was granted, and where there is no suggestion that the city was penetrated; the point is that Abû Mûsâ saw through the marzbân's trick, executing him and 80 fighters (muqâţîla) as a result.102 A version of the same story is then related by a participant in the battle; here we read of an anonymous dihqân.103 Ibn
A’tham has a version of the same story, but now both the marzbân (Sâbûr ibn Adharmâhân) and a lieutenant are given names. Meanwhile, Sayf seems to be at pains to demonstrate the elemency of the victorious Muslims: the city is stormed after a siege, the conquered pathetically beg for mercy, and a sulh is granted by the Muslims, who are apparently led by Abû Sabra, although Abû Mûsâ is also present. Behind the tradition—and perhaps the trickery account as well—are signs of some disagreement: the granting of a sulh after the Muslims’ violent entrance (ba’d mâ dakhalihâ ‘anwatan), and the division of spoils that is said to have taken place before the sulh (wa’qtasamû mâ asâbû qaÂbla b-sulh) suggest that this is a reconciling account, intended to accommodate conflicting sulh and ‘amwa traditions. The failed ruse may perform a similar function for Ibn A’tham: spoils were taken after an amâr because of the trickery. Certainly our Syriac account, which details the killing of Christians in the city, does not inspire much confidence in reports such as these. In none of these Islamic accounts does al-Hurmuza appear.

In Sayf’s report al-Hurmuza is again absent in the Sasanian defence, but we may have an echo of his presence: al-Shahriya, said to be al-Hurmuza’s brother, leads the Muslims in battle. It is here that we get a glimpse at what really concerned the authorities: the fate of the asâwîra, the elite cavalry of the Sasanian army. The asâwîra, like so much in early Islamic history, are only now beginning to receive their due, and although the conquest accounts have generally been enough to persuade historians that they converted in this period, there is some evidence to suggest that their conversion is a product of the Umayyad period. For early Muslim traditionists it was probably not so much their conversion that was at issue as the top stipends that they were awarded: that al-Baladhuri devoted an entire section to anî al-asâwîra wa-l-zutta at least suggests that the issue retained some interest as late as his day. On the one hand, there was a view that the asâwîra remained loyal to the Sasanicæns through Tustar. Thus Ibn A’tham, whose sequence follows that of our Syriac source, has no problem in putting not only marâzib, but also asâwîra in al-Hurmuza’s forces that resisted the Muslims at Tustar; Ibn Sa’d (d. 230/844) also preserves a reconstruction of events that has al-Hurmuza commanding a group of asâwîra at Tustar. On the other hand, al-Mâdâ’înî seems to reflect a widely held view that Siyâh al-Uswârî was sent by Yazdagird to defend al-Sûs, while al-Hurmuza was sent to Tustar; and when, according to al-Baladhuri’s sources, Siyâh learned of the capitulation of al-Sûs, or, according to al-Mâdâ’înî, came to realize more generally that the Muslims...

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104 Ibn A’tham, Futuh, II, 6–7.
105 Cf. the case of Siuq al-Ahwâz, about which Khalifâ ibn Khayyât (Tâ’irík, I, 106) reports that it was conquered sulham wa’ ‘amwatam.
107 Ibn A’tham, Futuh, II, 7.
were overwhelming the Sasanians, he and the asāwīra enrolled in the Muslim armies instead.\textsuperscript{113} This opens the door—perhaps only narrowly—for the participation of the asāwīra at Tustar, which was reluctantly conceded.\textsuperscript{114}

Indeed, it is only by presuming that they converted before Tustar that we can understand Sayf’s version of events. For Sayf has it that ‘Umar ordered Abū Mūsā to assign them the highest stipend, equal to that granted to any Arab tribesman, even though Abū Mūsā had nothing but disdain for their feeble effort at Tustar. A few lines of poetry that follow give voice to consequent Arab resentment:

When ‘Umar (al-fārūq) saw the excellence of their valor
And came to see what might come of the matter,\textsuperscript{115}
He assigned to them a stipend of two thousand.
Having seen fit to give the ‘Akk and Ḥimyar a stipend of three hundred.\textsuperscript{116}

Reports that identify Sinah/Sineh as the traitor who betrayed Tustar to the Muslims presumably reflect the same anti-asāwīra sentiments that produced these lines.\textsuperscript{117}

We are on firmer ground concerning Daniel. The legendary connection between Daniel and al-Sūs is not an Islamic invention.\textsuperscript{118} It had been made before Islam,\textsuperscript{119} and by the seventh century (if not earlier) it appears to have gained wide currency. Thus, the Armenian history attributed to Sebōs (wr. c. 660–70) relates that the Byzantine emperor Maurice (r. 582–602) made an unsuccessful attempt to remove Daniel’s body from al-Sūs to Constantinople; as in our Syriac account, here too various claims were made about the identity of the deceased.\textsuperscript{120} It is in the light of this material that we should read our Syriac account: ‘they [the Arabs] seized the house that is called the “House of Mār Daniel”, and took the treasure there enclosed, which had been kept there on the kings’ orders since the days of Darius and Cyrus’. It is in the same light that we should also read the Arabic accounts of how Daniel’s body was discovered in al-Sūs; these are positively ubiquitous in the conquest tradition.\textsuperscript{121}

As late antique monotheists, the conquering Muslims might be expected to have taken an interest in Daniel, in this period considered a prophet not only by Christians, but also by some Jews.\textsuperscript{122} He does not appear in the Quran, but remembering that this inventory was not complete,\textsuperscript{123} and assuming as

\textsuperscript{113} Al-Ṭabarī, Taʾrīkh, I, 2566–4; al-Balādhurī, Futūḥ, 372–3, on the authority of ‘a group of learned men’ (jumāʿa min ahl al-ʿilm).

\textsuperscript{114} Al-Balādhurī, Futūḥ, 382; juqal...wa-Allāh aʿlām, ‘it is said...but God knows best’, al-Ṭabarī, Taʾrīkh, I, 2563, 2564; wa-qawm wa-qamīna, ‘there are some who say’.

\textsuperscript{115} i.e. he recognized their potential, as well as the hazards of putting them off.

\textsuperscript{116} Al-Ṭabarī, Taʾrīkh, I, 2563–4.

\textsuperscript{117} On the betrayal of Tustar, below.


\textsuperscript{119} See the evidence gathered by Louis Ginzberg in his \textit{The legends of the Jews} (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1928), VI, 437 n. 20.


\textsuperscript{123} See Sūrat Ghafār (40), v. 78: wa-la-qul arsalnū rusūlān min qabila minhum man quasānā ’alāyka wa-minhum man lam naqṣas ’alāyka, ‘We sent Messengers before thee; of some We have
well that this inventory gradually created, rather than reflected, a consensus, one might speculate that the conquering Muslims had open minds.\footnote{124}

In contrast to the attitudes of the conquering Muslims, the concerns of the later traditionists are fairly clear. First, Daniel’s prophecies enjoyed some popularity in the early period, and this almost certainly reflects the broad appeal of apocalyptic texts among Christians\footnote{125} and Muslims alike.\footnote{126} In fact, Sayf (or one of his sources) betrays an Islamic triumphalism that is only fully intelligible in the light of Christian millenarian anxieties that tied the conquest of al-Sūs to the eschaton. Sayf reports that the monks and priests (\textit{al-ruḥbān wa-l-qassātūn}) mocked the besieging Muslims from the top of the walls of the city: ‘O host of Arabs, among the things taught us by our learned men and ancestors is that only the Antichrist, or an army led by the Antichrist (\textit{qawm fīhīm al-dajāl}), will conquer al-Sūs. If the Antichrist is leading you, you will take it (al-Sūs); if he is not, don’t bother besieging us’.\footnote{127} Of course in the eyes of Muslim informants the conquests were the work not of the Antichrist, but of God Himself; and far from marking the beginning of the End, they came to mark an altogether new beginning. The successful siege of al-Sūs thus makes a mockery of the Christians and their misplaced trust, turning what must have been a familiar topos on its head.\footnote{128}

The Daniel tradition seems to have been informed by iconoclastic concerns as well.\footnote{129} Here it may be significant that the Syriac does not corroborate the Islamic accounts that describe the Arabs’ relocation of Daniel’s body. Although the story is recounted in several different ways,\footnote{130} all are drawn together by a shared concern to make the site inaccessible to those determined to locate—and perhaps translate—relics.\footnote{131}

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related to thee, and some We have not related to thee’ (Arberry). Cf. the relatively early discussion in ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Habīb (d. 238/852), \textit{Kitāb al-ta`rīkh}, ed. Jorge Aguadé (Madrid: Consejo superior de investigaciones científicas, 1991), 26–7.\footnote{124}

In fact, occasional passages in the Islamic sources echo the Rabbi’s rejection of his prophetic status, and sound like special pleading. Note, for instance, the words attributed to Abū Sabra (al-Tabari, \textit{Ta`rīkh}, I, 2566), but particularly those of ‘Alī, who answered a query by stating: \textit{bālā hādīhū Dānūsīl al-hakīm wa-l-ha[hwa ghayr musal} (Ibn A’tam, \textit{Futūḥ}, II, 8), cf. Ibn Abī Shayba, \textit{Masānnaf}, VIII, 31: \textit{fa-inna nabi} (but not, it appears, \textit{a rasil}). For a particularly rich discussion of rasīl and nabi, see Geo Widengren, \textit{Muhammad, the Apostle of God, and his Ascension (King and Saviour V)} (Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksells, 1955), chapters 1–4.\footnote{125}


Al-Tabari, \textit{Ta`rīkh}, I, 2564–5.\footnote{129}

The presence of the Antichrist in a besieging army has a long tradition in Christian writing; for a fourth-century example, see Norman Cohn, \textit{The pursuit of the millennium}, revised ed. (London: Pimlico, 1993), 27–8.\footnote{130}

A strong aversion to relics and icons is attested in an early eighth-century source from southern Iraq; for a brief summary of the unpublished Syriac disputation between a monk of Bēt Hāk and an Arab, see G. J. Reink, trans., \textit{Die syrische Apokalypse des pseudo-Methodius} (Louvain: Peeters, 1993; CSCO 541, Scr. syri 221), xviii. See also Hoyland, \textit{Seeing Islam as others saw it}, 465–72; for some tentative archaeological evidence for Islamic iconoclasm, see Robert Schuck, \textit{The Christian communities of Palestine from Byzantine to Islamic rule: a historical and archaeological study} (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1995), 207–09.\footnote{131}

Al-Balādhūrī, \textit{Futūḥ}, 378; al-Tabari, \textit{Ta`rīkh}, I, 2567; Ibn A’tam, \textit{Futūḥ}, II, 8–9.\footnote{132}

The reason is made explicit by Ibn A’tam (\textit{Futūḥ}, II, 8), who has ‘All recommend that the body be returned in a place where the people of al-Sūs would not be able to find his grave’. cf. Ibn Abī Shayba, \textit{Masānnaf}, VIII, 31–2, on a Tustar corpse discussed below: ‘a place known only to you two’. According to al-Qummī (\textit{Ta`rīkh-i Qummī, 297}), only some Qummīs who just happened to be in al-Sūs were told of its location.
Tustar I: traitors and treaties

If the historiography of the conquest of Khuzistan has generally moved little from Wellhausen’s day, an exception is the siege of Tustar. The historicity of this siege was accepted by Wellhausen and Caetani, and continues to be accepted elsewhere; in some quarters this also includes an act of treachery on the part of a Tustari local, which delivered the city into the Muslims’ hands. But with Noth we finally have a dissident voice. Pointing to the multiplicity of siege accounts in the Islamic conquest traditions in general, and adducing the Tustar account in particular, he argues that they must be interpreted as a feature of historical discourse: they represent ‘not the reporting of history, but rather the deployment of literary stereotypes’.

In general terms, Noth is certainly correct: siege/betrayal accounts can function stereotypically, ‘drifting’ from one event to the next. It may be that the appearance of the topos in the futuḥ literature is in some way related to the treacherous Jew of the sīra. Since the repertoire of pre-Islamic Syriac historical writing includes siege accounts of great drama, one might also suggest that it was popular enough to circulate widely in the Near East of late antiquity. In any case, just as a specific takbīr account can be corroborated by an early Syriac source, so too, it appears, can the occasional siege. In this particular case, accounts that relate a siege and betrayal quite clearly reflect an early—and authentic—memory of events. For there is Syriac corroboration not only for the betrayal of the city, but also for the length of the siege (two years), as well as for the Muslims’ penetration of the city through water tunnels under its walls.

The siege is very well attested in the Islamic sources; see Khalīfa ibn Khayyāt, Tārīkh, I, 133, 138–42; Ibn Ābi Shayba, Musammāf, VIII, 28–32; al-Ṭabarī, Tārīkh, I, 2352–6; al-Baladhuri, Futuḥ, II, 12–15, I, 125; Ibn Sa’d, Tabaqāt, V, 64; al-Qummi, Tārīkh al-Qummi, 297–8. See also Bar Hebraeus, Tārīkh, 174.


D. R. Hill, for example, considers: ‘That the entry was effected through the treachery of a citizen is quite probable, the Muslims at this time being inept in siege warfare’. See his The termination of hostilities in the early Arab conquests, A.D. 634–65 (London: Luzac, 1971), 134; ‘Abd al-Husayn Zarzi, The Arab conquest of Iran and its aftermath, in Cambridge history of Iran, IV, ed. R. N. Frye (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 15: ‘The siege of Shustar was protracted, but in the end an Iranian’s treachery—his name was Siya—enabled the Arabs to enter the city.’

Noth/Conrad, Early Arabic historical tradition, 19.

The traitor topos is also noted by Lawrence I. Conrad, The conquest of Arwād; a source-critical study in the historiography of the early medieval Near East, in Cameron and Conrad, eds, The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East, I, 363.


Of the many examples that could be cited, see ps-Zacharias Rheter, (wr. c. 550), Historia ecclesiastica Zachariae Rhetori volgo aedicta, ed. and trans. E. W. Brooks (Paris: L. Durbeq, 1919–21; CSCO 83–84, Scr. syri 38–39), VII, ii–iv (25–28/16–19), IX, xvii (132–33/90–91). Similarly, The Chronicle of Joshua the Stylite (written c. 518), ed. and trans. William Wright (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1882), 30/42 (guards fall asleep): ‘Whether then through this remissness, as we think, or by an act of treachery, as people said, or as a chastisement from God...’ (Weight’s translation); and 68/59 (vīlerset) helps Byzantines against Persians. Also, compare the final section of translated Syriac above (a Qatari colludes with someone who has a house on the city walls) with ps-Joshua, 69/59–60 (defenders have built temporary houses on the walls); are we to understand that the co-conspirator was part of the force defending the city?

It almost goes without saying that stories such as these have a very long tradition. Cf. Joshua 2, which describes how Rahab, a harlot in Jericho, admits, shelters, and cuts a deal with Israelite spies that guarantees the safety of her family; for a discussion and bibliography, see J. Alberto Soggin, Joshua: a commentary (London: SCM Press, 1972), 34–43.

Crone, Slaves, 12.

Thus Ibn Sa’d, Tabaqāt, V, 64 (a variant also proposes eighteen months); Khalīfa ibn Khayyāt, Tārīkh, I, 139 (around a year), 141 (two years or eighteen months); Ibn Ābi Shayba, Musammāf, VIII, 28 (around a year).

Thus Ibn Ābi Shayba, Musammāf, VIII, 28: fa-adkhalahu min madkhal al-māʾ; Khalīfa ibn Khayyāt, Tārīkh, I, 139: fa-adkhalahu min madkhal al-māʾ madkhalah; Ibn A’tham, Fustūḥ, II, 20:
Of course this is not to say that we should accept the Tustar traditions in their entirety. For sieges produce tales: tales of courage, piety, steadfastness, of clemency, arrogance, and hubris. As Nöldeke remarked, the particularly long siege of Tustar produced its share of stories, and these probably explain why the conquest was invoked in apparently stereotypical fashion. We may even have a very brief glimpse of the Sitz im Leben of some of the storytelling. Asked by ‘Umar to speak on the conquest of Tustar, ‘Ziyād (ibn Abīhi) arose and spoke with such skill that the people were astonished by his eloquence, proclaiming: Ibn ‘Ubayd is a khaṭīb Needless to say, a performance such as this one earned praise not for its dogged fidelity to what happened, but by moving people; what mattered was not a close correspondence to historical truth, but rather the speaker’s impressive command of a rhetoric that told a great story. Since the process by which memory was clouded by tale-telling was already well under way when we get our first look at our traditions, there is no question of finding an Islamic account that has survived unaffected: legendary material crowds our early accounts (Ibn Sa’d, Ibn Abī Shayba, and Khalīf Ibn Khayyāt), as it crowds our later sources.

Now some of this material, such as the legendary awā’il, we can safely argue away, not only because they are usually so transparent, but also because they are often expendable: no serious interpretation of the conquest of Tustar turns on ‘the first to light the fire at the gate of Tustar’. The point I would emphasize here is the difficulty of distinguishing between the baby and the bath. Without our Syriac text, for example, we would not know that it was apparently only the identity of the traitor that was conditioned by polemics. In most of the early accounts the traitor remains stubbornly anonymous, but exceptions are al-Dinawarī and Abī ‘Ubayda/Ibn Ishaq (as preserved in al-Qummi); in both cases the figure starts out anonymously (rajud mīn ašrāf aḥl al-maḏīna, dihqān az jumleḥ-i buzurgān-i Tustar), but is then identified as a certain Sīnā/Sīneh (wa’ṣamhulu Sīnā, nām-i ʿū Sīneh).

As we have already seen, his appearance here should probably be explained in the light of asāwīra polemics; we may also have yet another example of the ‘onomatomania’ of the Islamic tradition.

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nuhr Tustar. The ‘appendix’ thus clinches Gautier Juynboll’s argument that something authentic lay behind Sayf’s material (al-Ṭabarī, Taʾrīkh, I, 2554–5: makhraj al-manʿa); see the second appendix to his Tabari translation, The history of al-Ṭabarī, XIII: the conquest of Iraq, southwestern Persia and Egypt (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 227–9. For a rehabilitation (on very different grounds) of the view that Jerusalem fell to the ‘Israelites’ because the latter penetrated the city’s defences through an aqueduct, see Z. Abells and A. Arbit, ‘Some new thoughts on Jerusalem’s ancient water system’, PEQ 127 (1995), 2.

Nöldeke, ‘Chronik’, 44 n. 1.


146 As we have already seen, his appearance here should probably be explained in the light of asāwīra polemics; we may also have yet another example of the ‘onomatomania’ of the Islamic tradition.
Of the traitor’s actual identity we shall probably never know the details, for the Nestorian authorities naturally had their own axes to grind; here, like in the Arabic, the identity of the traitor was polemically conditioned. The provenance of the Tustar traitor is suspiciously the same as that of a certain Peter, also a native of Bēt Qatrāyē, who is said to have betrayed Alexandria to the Persians in an early part of the chronicle. In neither Alexandria nor in Tustar can we corroborate the identities of these men, and to explain why Bēt Qatrāyē is given to provide figures such as these we should probably look to the Nestorian ecclesiastical controversies that took place when our work was being assembled. For it was in the middle of the seventh century that the bishops of Fārs, and soon after, Bēt Qatrāyē, refused to acknowledge the authority of Ishoho’yāb III, who served as catholicos of the Nestorian church from 649 to 659. Several of the letters written by Ishoho’yāb III address the problem of the recalcitrant bishops of Bēt Qatrāyē, and one, which can be dated to the period between 649 and 659, states that George, the bishop of Shūshtrā, was among those enrolled to argue the catholicos’ view. Just as in its earliest datable form the tradition is credited by ‘Abd al-Razzaq al-Šan’ānī (d. 211/826), as by al-Baladhuri after him, to Ibn Jurayj (d. 150/767), on the authority of ‘Atā’ al-Khurāsānī (d. 133/750). The tradition being impossible to confirm, we might explain it in the light of post-conquest polemics. Considering that the issue addressed by ‘Atā’ is a taxation anomaly—why ‘Umar exempted the issue of conquest unions between the muḥājirūn and Tustarī women—one is tempted to think that the tradition is primarily aetiological. Similarly, if the purported participation of the muḥājirūn might have functioned to endow Tustar with high-status settlers, so too might accounts that posit a city’s

152 There is no mention of a traitor in the account available to Ibn Sa’d (Tabaqūt, V, 64), but here Ibn Sa’d is interested only in the events that follow al-Harmuzān’s surrender.
154 For an overview of the controversy, see Fiey, ‘Išo’yāw le Grand’.
156 Liber epistularum, 259/187.
159 On Ibn Jurayj and this ‘Atā’ (who is not to be confused with ‘Atā’ ibn Abī Rabāh), see Harald Motzki, Die Anfänge der islamischen Jurisprudenz (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1991), 183–218.
160 To expect our Syriac source to concede that Tustar’s Nestorian authorities reneged on an earlier agreement—unless, of course, it was to be portrayed as heroic resistance—is perhaps unreasonable as it is to expect the Islamic tradition to record the apparently wanton killing of local Christians (on which see below). Hill (Termination, 134) is sceptical of this kufr tradition, suggesting that it refers to another (unnamed) city.
161 See Noth/Conrad, Early Arabic historical tradition, 98, 210; and cf. Tarif Khalidi, Arabic historical thought in the classical period (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 46 (explaining the chronological and geographical organization of the tabaqūt): ‘What may have been at issue is a kind of apostolic truth theory whereby the Prophet’s companions and their descendants act as guarantors of the true faith in the cities where they settled’. (It almost goes without saying that the authors disagree about the reliability of the early source material.) Cf. C. F. Robinson, Islamic historiography (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 138 ff.
kufr reconcile conflicting accounts of its conquest history. For while the conquest tradition conceives the sulh ba’d fath arrangement,\textsuperscript{162} it was too awkward to argue for a fath ba’d sulh, since this would cast dishonour on the conquering Muslims: hence kufr accounts, which shift responsibility for renewing hostilities back to the conquered.

If there is a kernel of truth in all of this, it is probably that the conquest was violent. That the Islamic tradition says nothing of the killing of local Christians is to be explained not only by its relative indifference to (and absence of solid information about) the fate of the conquered,\textsuperscript{163} but also by the political circumstances in which it stabilized. Clearly defined legal rights and peaceful co-existence, the latter commonly articulated in the Prophetic prohibition of killing monks,\textsuperscript{164} are developments of the post-conquest period. Of course a similar thing can once again be said about the Christian tradition: had our Syriac source been written a century later, when the Christian élites had begun to work out a modus vivendi with the Muslims, the killing might have been conveniently forgotten as well.

Finally, an account that posits the discovery of an uncorrupted corpse of another (now unidentified) prophet in Tustar is almost certainly bogus.\textsuperscript{165} It was probably invoked to support claims made in the course of the ‘asabiyyāt that flared up between the Tustaris and Sūsis about Daniel’s tābāt.\textsuperscript{166} As a source of local pride, as well as a draw for pilgrims, sites such as these were obviously of some value.\textsuperscript{167}

Tustar II: the organization of traditions

For the purposes of historical reconstruction, we can say with some confidence that reports of a siege led by Abū Mūsā al-Ash’āri, which was then followed by a betrayal from within, reflect early and authentic memories of the events in question. How was this memory transmitted? The question is a notoriously difficult one, but in Tustar we have enough evidence to tease out some provisional answers.

We can start with the collections in which the Tustar accounts were included. The conquest traditions of Khūzistān seem to have been compiled into province-based collections (e.g. al-Madā’in\textsuperscript{168} and Abū ‘Ubaydā’s\textsuperscript{169} Futūḥ al-Ahwāz), as well as into Basran-based collections (e.g. al-Madā’in’s Khabār al-Basra wa-futūḥāh).\textsuperscript{170} Detailed descriptions of the first of these seem to be lacking in the literature, but we are fortunate to have a glimpse at the contents of the second. According to Ibn al-Nadīm, it began as follows: ‘Dastumaysa, the governorship of al-Mughīrah ibn Shu’ba, the governorship

\textsuperscript{162} Al-Ṭabarī Ta’rīkh, I, 2565; cf. al-Balādhurī, Futūḥ, 378.
\textsuperscript{163} For other examples of conquest killing, see Crone and Cook, Hagarism, 33.
\textsuperscript{164} Thus Abū Yusuf, Kharāj, 195: ‘asbāb al-ṣamā‘a”.
\textsuperscript{165} Ibn Abī Shayba, Musannaf, VIII, 31–2.
\textsuperscript{166} These are attested for a later period; see al-Muqaddāsī (wr. c. 375/985), Ahsan al-taqāṣīm fi marifat al-aqālim, ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1906; BGA 3), 417; also noted by Claude Cahen, ‘Mouvements populaires et autonomisme urbain dans l’Asie musulmane du Moyen Age’, Arabica 6 (1959), 28. The Jews of al-Sūs in Benjamin of Tudela’s time are said to have argued about the tomb as well; see Benjamin of Tudela (fl. mid-12th c.), Itinerary, ed. and trans. Marcus Nathan Adler (New York: Philipp Feldheim, 1907), 52–3.
\textsuperscript{168} In the thirteenth century Tustar could claim the tomb of the sixth Imām of the Shī’as, Ja’far al-Sādiq (d. 148/765); see al-Harawī (d. 611/1215), Al-Ishārah ʿalā marifat al-ziyārah, trans. Janine Sourdel-Thomine as Guide des lieux de pèlerinage (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1957), 222–3.
\textsuperscript{169} Ibn al-Nadīm, Fihrist, 103; Yaqūt, Irshād, V, 316.
\textsuperscript{170} See above, n. 58.
\textsuperscript{170} Ibn al-Nadīm, Fihrist, 103.
of Abū Mūsā, the matter (khabar) of al-Ahwāz, of al-Manādhir, of Nahr Tīrā, of al-Sūs, of Tustar, of the citadel (al-qal’a), of al-Hurmuza, of Dabba ibn Miḥsan, of Jundaysābūr’. Why the material was assembled into this form, in addition to the more conventional Futūḥ al-Ahwāz form, can be explained at least in part by the administrative controversy that pitted Basrans against Kūfans; for what we really have is a set of traditions recounting the victorious march of Basran armies against the remnants of the Sasanian state.

There are, in addition, two very striking features in Ibn al-Nadīm’s survey of al-Ma’dā’īni’s work. The first is that the order of titles—here representing ‘section headings’—clearly reflects the sequence of events and battles as they are known to us from (most of) the surviving sources: Abū Mūsā follows al-Mughīra ibn Shu’ba, and his appointment is followed by the conquests of al-Manādhir, Nahr Tīrā, al-Sūs, and Tustar (Jundaysābūr being misplaced after Tustar).173 Given the dearth of second- and early third-century material, it is useful to know that the hard work of establishing a more or less correct sequence was apparently finished by this time.174

The second striking feature is the detail concerning the conquest of Tustar, particularly al-Hurmuza’s role in it.175 Now in his attention to al-Hurmuza, al-Ma’dā’īni is clearly reflecting broader trends: thus Ibn Abī Shayba has a long section on ‘What was related concerning Tustar’ (ma ḏukira fī Tustar), which is dominated by al-Hurmuza, and the otherwise laconic Khalīfā ibn Khayyāt, drawing on sources that include al-Ma’dā’īni, pauses for four pages of material on waqṭ Tustar; here too al-Hurmuza plays the starring role.176 What makes Ibn al-Nadīm’s description of al-Ma’dā’īni’s work especially interesting is his organization of this material into three discrete sections, i.e. khabar Tustar, khabar al-qal’a, and khabar al-Hurmuza. The khabar al-qal’a must refer to a set of traditions concerning the siege of the city in general and al-Hurmuza’s sheltering inside the citadel (qal’a, qasaba) in particular; this is usually, but not always, described as the result of the Muslims’ penetration of the city walls. The khabar al-Hurmuza, it follows, would have been a collection of reports relating his surrender and meeting with ‘Umar in Medina; a favourite account is a ruse by which al-Hurmuza secured safe passage.177 The concerns here are fairly easy to discern: to contrast the pious austerity of ‘Umar with the imperious ostentatiousness of al-Hurmuza—that is, to give vivid illustration to the Arabian God’s victory over the polytheist Sasanians.178 The dominant metaphor seems to be al-Hurmuza’s fine clothing, which is contrasted with ‘Umar’s spare garb; that the scene is a topos is almost certain.179

171 Flügel (Fihrist, 103) here read Dastawa, which makes enough sense (see Yaqūt, Mu’jam, II, 574); but I follow Dodge (The Fihrist, I, 225) and Tajaddud (Fihrist, 115).
173 The early and indecisive campaigns that go almost entirely unnoticed by our Syriac source are presumably embedded in the section on the governorship of al-Mughīra ibn Shu’ba.
174 Khalīfā ibn Khayyāt, who had access to al-Ma’dā’īni’s work on al-Ahwāz (Taʾrīkh, I, 140: qāla Abī l-Hasan), may have had the good judgement to ignore his sequence when it came to Jundaysābūr.
175 Caetani (Annali dell’Islam, III, 908–9) may have been the first to note the crucial role played by al-Hurmuza in the conquest accounts. The advice given by al-Hurmuza to ‘Umar about the conquest of Isfahān is discussed by Albrecht Noth, ‘Iṣfahān–Nihawand. Eine quellenkritische Studie zur frühislamische Historiographie’, ZDMG 118 (1968), 283–4.
176 Note as well that Sayf’s account as preserved by al-Tabarī reveals increasingly with biographical material on al-Hurmuza, see al-Tabarī, Taʾrīkh, I, 2534.
177 Khalīfā ibn Khayyāt, Taʾrīkh, I, 142; al-Balāḏūrī, Futūḥ, 381.
178 Thus al-Tabarī, Taʾrīkh, I, 2557–8; Ibn Saʿd, Tabaqāt, V, 64–5: al-hamd lillah alladhi adhalla baḥtā wa-shī’atā bi-l-Īlām, etc.
179 See, for example, al-Yaʿqūbī, Historiarum, II, 163. In her article ‘al-Hurmuza’in EI, III (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971), 586b, Laura Vecchia Vaglieri concedes that al-Hurmuza’s ‘arrival in Medina is described with a number of details that seem to bear a romantic stamp’.
leaves us with the problematic reading of khabar Tustar; if it is correct, it probably refers to the campaigning that led up to the siege.

Of course, that al-Madâ’înî organized a mass of Tustari traditions in this fashion in no way means that they were always so carefully distinguished. This is made plain by a contemporary, Ibn Abî Shayba, a mukaddim who does us the favour of citing relatively full isnâds, and who also eschews the akhbâris’ practice of breaking up and rearranging akhbâr. His first account of the battle of Tustar and its aftermath was transmitted from Qurâd Abû Nuh (’Abd al-Rahmân ibn Ghazwân, d. 207/822), and is ultimately credited to ’Abd al-Rahmân ibn Abî Bakra (d. c. 100/718). The account seems to reflect a fairly naive stage of tradition building. It takes the reader through the siege, surrender, and al-Hurmuzân’s meeting with ’Umar; and for all that it presents an edifying story, organized primarily around the dialogue, it is disarmingly vague: we have but a handful of characters, and no attempt to locate the events chronologically. It may reasonably be taken to represent one late first- or early second-century Baṣran tale of the conquest. Khalîfa ibn Khayyât had access to the same account, which he too credits to Qurâd Abû Nuh, now via an intermediary, ‘Alî ibn ’Abd Allâh. Whereas Ibn Abî Shayba probably preserved this account in extenso, Khalîfa ibn Khayyât, here wearing an akhbâris’s hat, gives us a highly abbreviated version. It too enjoys pride of place in Khalîfa’s presentation, but now the account is stripped of all but its essentials, and breaks off when al-Hormuzân takes refuge in his citadel. The tradition has apparently begun to fragment, in this case according to the categories reflected in al-Madâ’înî’s work.

Conclusion

One can only agree with Conrad that ‘work that securely vindicates, rather than repudiates, the historicity of early Arabic accounts is extremely difficult’. As I have tried to show, our Syriac passage can be handled in such a way so as to vindicate and repudiate. Since much of the preceding has also been fairly rough going, I shall conclude by restating more concisely, and briefly elaborating upon, my principal conclusions.

1. A local seventh-century Syriac source, which is historiographically independent of the Islamic tradition, can offer impressive corroboration for accounts preserved in a range of Arabic-Islamic sources, which generally date from the ninth and tenth centuries. Since the corroboration is occasionally detailed and precise, in this case there can be no doubt that the nascent historical tradition

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180 Ibn Sa’d, Tabaqât, VII.2, 77; Ibn Hajar (d. 852/1449), Tahâdhîb al-tahâdhîb (Hyderabad: Dâ’îrat al-ma’ârif al-nizâmiyya, 1325–27), VI, 247–9; al-Dhahabi (d. 748/1348), Siyar a’lâm al-mubalâ’în, ed. Shu’ayb al-Arna’î and ‘Ali ibn Khayya, a local seventh-century Syriac source, which is historiographically independent of the Islamic tradition, can offer impressive corroboration for accounts preserved in a range of Arabic-Islamic sources, which generally date from the ninth and tenth centuries. Since the corroboration is occasionally detailed and precise, in this case there can be no doubt that the nascent historical tradition.

was in some measure continuous. The results here thus contrast sharply with another recent comparison of Arabic and Syriac sources, where it was shown that the former retain only the vaguest outlines of the conquest of Arwâd, a small island off the coast of Syria. Here radical discontinuity was the lesson learned.\textsuperscript{185}

Part of the explanation for the contrast may lie in the relative strengths of the Syrian and Iraqi historical traditions. For although Syria did produce more historiography than has generally been assumed, it cannot compare with that of Iraq; and what was produced in Syria was frequently slighted by later Iraqi authorities in favour of Iraqi traditions.\textsuperscript{186} But since the invention of tradition was apparently not limited to Syria,\textsuperscript{187} and furthermore, since the survival of some authentic material from Syria was occasionally possible as well,\textsuperscript{188} this explanation cannot take us terribly far. It is thus probably more fruitful to draw a slightly different contrast. Left in the hands of the Iraqis, for whom the fate of the Mediterranean island of Arwâd could hardly have constituted a serious concern, such conquest tradition as there was disintegrated almost entirely.\textsuperscript{189} By contrast, we have seen that the conquest of Khûzistân in general, and Tustar in particular, mattered a great deal to the neighbouring Basrans and Kûfâns;\textsuperscript{190} indeed, were it not for the Kûfan/Basran debates, much more material might have been lost. It may seem trite to point out that history that matters is more readily transmitted than history that does not; but in this case it bears repeating. If we assume that the tradition remained oral beyond the lifetime of the participants, as we must,\textsuperscript{191} the continuing interests of the Basrans and Kûfâns in the conquest fate of cities to the south provide the best explanation for the survival of material in oral form. There is no general life expectancy for oral traditions.\textsuperscript{192}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{185} ibid., particularly 388: ‘...the fact remains that it can be demonstrated in every case that the Arab-Islamic material for the conquest of Arwâd does not and cannot consist of accounts passed on from one generation to the next in a continuous tradition beginning with the generation of the Arab conquerors. Instead, the beginnings of the extant tradition for this event must be sought among Umayyad storytellers piecing together narratives with only the barest shreds of genuinely historical information to guide or restrain the process of reconstruction’.
\item \textsuperscript{188} See Noth, ‘Ishâhân-Nihâiwand’, Donner, Conquests, 198–9 (on Buwayb); and now Noth/Conrad, Early Arabic historical tradition.
\item \textsuperscript{189} See Donner, Conquests, 144 (al-Wâqîdî apparently corroborated by the Syriac tradition; there is no evidence that the latter depended on the Islamic).
\item \textsuperscript{190} Note that it is the Syriac tradition, in the person of Theophilus of Edessa (d. 785), that apparently corroborated by the Syriac tradition; there is no evidence that the latter depended on the Islamic.
\item \textsuperscript{191} Cf. Lecker’s comments a propos of Abu ‘Ubayda (‘Biographical notes’, 17): ‘...the conquests of the Sawâd and the neighboring Ahwâz were a kind of local history for the Basrân A.’.
\item \textsuperscript{192} The case that the early tradition was written down earlier is occasionally asserted (see, most recently, Khalidi, Arabic historical thought, 14, 26–7), but it has not been demonstrated. Much as one would like to see early Islamic scripturalism function as a catalyst for historical writing (cf. the role of Christianity in the shift from roll to codex), we lack the evidence to see this at work. For two recent views on the problem of the origins of Islamic historiography, see F. M. Donner, Narratives of Islamic origins: the beginnings of Islamic historical writing (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1998) and Robinson, Islamic historiography.
\end{itemize}
Of course, if the transmission of historical memory was not completely discontinuous, it was anything but disinterested. It is abundantly clear that much of the material was conditioned, and in some cases generated, by post-conquest polemics about spoils and administration. Even a tradition that at first glance suggests only simple storytelling of the awā’il variety, e.g. ‘the first to light the fire at the gate of Tustar’,\(^{193}\) is adduced by Abū Yusuf in his discussion of the division of spoils.\(^{194}\) One can disagree with Dennett’s qualifications of Becker, or Noth’s qualifications of Dennett, but there is no denying the insight that draws together all their work, and which Calder has emphasized: conquest accounts ‘should be recognized as bearers of ideological and juristic messages’.\(^ {195}\) To take only one example: if one’s share of the booty was determined in part by whether one was walking rather than riding, and if the latter, on what kind of mount,\(^ {196}\) how are we to describe how such-and-such a city was taken?

What our Syriac source shows, however—and this needs to be emphasized—is that the Khūzistān tradition is more than the accumulation of details arbitrarily added by storytellers, more than topoi and schemata, and finally more than back-projected legal precedents or assertions of state and provincial power. All of these do appear, crowding, and no doubt occasionally crowding out, authentic material. But some authentic material did survive, and since some of this at first appears to be manifestly stereotypical, the task of distinguishing between authentic and unauthentic is no simple matter. The conquest of Tustar shows many of the signs that usually betray literary effect, e.g. statements describing the enemy’s strength,\(^ {197}\) a great siege, tribal boasting, and eschatological allusions, but for all these it cannot be dismissed as merely topological.

2. The survival of authentic material is most striking at the level of individual scenes (e.g. the siege/betrayal at Tustar; Daniel’s tomb at al-Sūs), although it is certainly true that legendary elements can arise here too (e.g. the traitor’s name at Tustar). The results thus support Noth’s view that the conquest traditions as we have them are generally composite reconstructions, assembled out of discrete units, rather than pieces of a now-lost coherent whole.\(^ {198}\)

This said, our Syriac source can also corroborate the Islamic tradition on matters that are not ‘scene-specific’, but rather represent a more synthetic understanding of events, e.g. the principal role played by Abū Mūsā al-Asḥarī in the protracted campaigns, and matters of sequence as well, particularly the secondary capitulations of al-Sūs and Tustar. This, in turn, suggests that at least some accounts concerning Tustar and al-Sūs were integrated early on into a fairly broad view of the Khūzistān campaign, that the collectors and systematizers of the second and third centuries had the historiographical resources and sophistication to overcome the limitations of source material that did not, or some combination of both. It is the nature of our evidence—and the state of research—that we cannot say much more than this. One can

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\(^{193}\) See above, n. 148.

\(^{194}\) Abū Yusuf, Khurāj, 198.


\(^{196}\) Al-Tabari, Ta’rikḥ, I, 2556; Abū Yusuf, Khurāj, 18; ‘Abd al-Razzāq, Musannaf, V, 183–7; Qudama ibn Ja’far (d. c. 310/922), Kita’b al-kharāj, ed. Husayn Mu’nis (Cairo: Dār al-shurūq, 1987), 59.

\(^{197}\) See, for example, al-Balādhurī, Futūḥ, 380: wa-bihā shawkat al-ṣadiq wa-haddūhum.

speculate that the memory of Abū Mūsā was kept alive by descendants in al-Ṭāʾīr, and we have also seen that the correct sequence of battles was already in place by the early third century. But these are just two pieces of a much larger puzzle.

3. The case of Khuzestan offers yet another illustration of how the ‘schools theory’ of the early tradition fails us. If Ibn Aṭ̣̄ām more frequently seems to have got things right, no single authority either resisted the forces of distortion completely, or monopolized early material entirely. In some cases the consensus of the Islamic tradition was vindicated; in others (e.g. the conquest of Jundaysābūr), minority views were corroborated. Sayf ibn ‘Umar seems to have been mistaken about the role of Abū Sabra at Tustar; on the other hand, he seems to have been the only authority who had reasonably good material on the truce(s) between al-Hurmuza and the campaigning Muslims. Indeed Sayf’s account, which describes the tribute arrangements between al-Hurmuza and the Muslims in an impressively imprecise way, passes Noth’s standards for authenticity with flying colours. The absence of detailed tribute accounts is an altogether striking characteristic of the Khuzestani conquest accounts in general, and this too seems to be the case for all of our traditionists, regardless of their provenance.

4. As far as the reconstruction of conquest history is concerned, we can have some confidence that Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī, then based in al-Ṭāʾīr, led a Muslim force that followed up earlier battles in Khuzestan; the capitulations of al-Ṭāʾīr and Tustar, which we can actually describe in some detail, marked the turning point in his campaign. That the Sasanian defence and Muslim advance concentrated on these cities can be explained by their administrative significance in the late Sasanian period. At least one truce was brokered, and as others preserved in very early sources, it was apparently negotiated by commanders on the scene; it stipulated the payment of tribute and described a frontier. Our source cannot corroborate the Islamic tradition in dating matters, but it gives no reason to doubt that Tustar had fallen by 22 or 23 AH.

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200 The argument for distinct historiographical schools was undercut by Albrecth Noth long ago, see his ‘Der Charakter der ersten grossen Sammlungen von Nachrichten zur früh-islamischen Histoire’, Der Islam 47 (1971), 168–99.

201 Cf. the case of Abū ‘Ubayda ibn al-Jarrāḥ (Albrecht Noth, Futūḥ-history and Futūḥ-historiography, Al-Qantara 10 [1989], 459); who seems to appear in Damascus conquest accounts only to function within the manifestly late suffaʾmain paradigm.


204 See ps.-Sebíos, Histoire d’Héraclius, 147, 164.
Appendix

Immediately following upon the passages I have translated above is an account alluding to the conquest of Syria and Egypt, and for the benefit of those interested, the following is a translation.205

Afterwards (bātarkēn) a man from the Arabs named Kāled came and went to the West, and took the lands and towns as far as ‘Arab.206 Heraclius, the king of the Byzantines, heard [this] and sent a large army against them, whose leader was called S-q-y-l-r-a.207 The Arabs defeated them, annihilating more than 100,000 Byzantines, whose commander they [also] killed. They also killed Īshō’dād, the bishop of Hirtā, who was there with ‘Abdmasıh;208 this Īshō’dād was undertaking an embassy between the Arabs and Byzantines. The Arabs [thus] took control of all the lands of Syria and Palestine. They wanted to enter the Egyptian [lands] as well, but they were unable, because the border (thōnā) was guarded by the Patriarch of Alexandria with a strong and large army. For he had blocked the marches of the land,209 and had built walls along the banks of the Nile in all the land. Only with difficulty, because of their (i.e. the walls’) height,210 were the Arabs able to enter and take the land of Egypt, Thebaid, and Africa.

If only because of a possible allusion to the enigmatic al-Muqawqis, this passage deserves some attention.211

205 The passage begins on 37: 15/31: 3 and ends on 38: 3/31: 20.


207 37: 19, which is to be compared with Nöldeke’s and Brock’s reconstruction of S[acellarios] in what is called the ‘record dated to AD 637’ in Palmer, Seventh century, 3; and Theophanes, Chronographia, ed. Karl de Boor (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1883–85), 372; sakellarios; trans. C. Mango and R. Scott, The Chronicle of Theophanes confessor (Oxford, 1997), 468f. For discussion see Donner, Conquests, 144–56; Walter Kaegei, Byzantium and the early Islamic conquests (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 99–100.

208 The presence of Īshō’dād in Syria is curious, and it may be that this sentence is out of place; Fiey (‘L’Elam…(suite),’ 137), seems to put this episode of killing in Tustar. In ‘Abdmasıh we almost certainly have ‘Abd al-Masıh ibn ‘Amr ibn ‘Abd al-Masıh, an Azdī native of al-Hira, who is well attested in the Islamic tradition: see al-Baladhurī, Futuḥ, 243; and Donner, Conquests, 183, 331 n. 83, for more literature.

209 Literally: ‘the entrances and exits’.

210 Cf. the accounts beginning at 30: 25/26: 15. Walls were generally seen as an effective defence against Arabs (in contrast to siege-laying imperial armies); see Procopius (wr. 550), The history of the wars, ed. and trans. H. B. Dewing (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961 reprint), II.iv.12; and ‘Joshua the Stylicate’, The Chronicle of Joshua the Stylicate, 63:54.