



ABŪ MŪSĀ AŠ'ARĪ

ABŪ MŪSĀ AŠ'ARĪ, 'ABDALLĀH B. QAYS, a Companion of the Prophet and important participant in the troubles which occupied the caliphate of 'Alī. He was at various times governor of Bašra and Kūfa and was involved in the early Arab conquests in Persia. In spite of plentiful references to him in the sources for the early history of Islam, it is not possible to be sure regarding many of the details of his career and the interpretation and evaluation of the role which he played in certain events.

The sources agree that Abū Mūsā came originally from the Yemen, where his tribe, the Aš'ar, dwelled in the pre-Islamic period, and that he first accepted Islam at Mecca before the Hejra but only joined the Prophet after the Hejra at the time of the conquest of Ḳaybar in 7/628. Between his acceptance of Islam and his joining the Prophet, some traditions say that he was in Abyssinia with those Muslims who went there from Mecca, others that he returned to his tribe in the Yemen (Ebn Sa'd, IV/1, pp. 78-79). In 8/629, following the conquest of Mecca, Abū Mūsā is named as one of those sent by the Prophet on the expedition to Awṭās (Wāqedī, *Mağāzī*, London, 1966, pp. 915-16; Ṭabarī, I, pp. 1666-67). In 10/631 he is said to have been sent by the Prophet as one of the governors over the Yemen, remaining there until the caliphate of Abū Bakr and taking part in the fighting against the local leader of the *redda* (lit. "apostasy") movement, al-Aswad (Ṭabarī, I, pp. 1852, 1854-55, 2136).

The various appointments of Abū Mūsā to the governorates of Bašra and Kūfa were made during the caliphates of 'Omar and 'Oṭmān, but the exact dates and circumstances are not always clear. It seems likely that he was first made



governor of Baṣra by 'Omar following the removal of Moḡīra b. Šo'ba from that office, probably in 17/638, and that he held the position at least twice during the caliphate of 'Omar, becoming governor of Kūfa for about a year between two spells of office in Baṣra (Ṭabarī, I, pp. 2388, 2498, 2529-33, 2551, 2676, 2678, 2693; Balāḍorī, *Fotūh*, pp. 344-46). When 'Oṭmān became caliph in 23/644, he confirmed Abū Mūsā over Baṣra but removed him in 29/649-50, it is said as a result of complaints made against him by the Basrans (Ṭabarī, I, pp. 2802, 2828). Later, however, in 34/654-55, 'Oṭmān made Abū Mūsā his governor of Kūfa, responding to the demands of dissidents there who called for his appointment in place of Sa'īd b. 'Āš (Ṭabarī, I, pp. 2930, 2935-36, 2950). When 'Oṭmān was murdered in 36/656, therefore, Abū Mūsā was governor of Kūfa (Ṭabarī, I, p. 3058).

In this period, when for most of the time he was governor of one or the other of the two Arab garrison towns in Iraq, Abū Mūsā is frequently mentioned in connection with the early Arab conquests in Iran, which were carried out mainly by forces from Baṣra and Kūfa. However, there are frequently variant traditions about these conquests and one cannot be certain about the precise role which Abū Mūsā played in them—whether, for example, he was or was not associated with the conquest of a particular place, whether he was acting on his own initiative or under a higher authority, and whether he took part in the fighting or only in the organization.

For example, Abū Mūsā is often mentioned in the reports about the conquest of Kūzestān, achieved mainly by forces from Baṣra between 17/638 and 21/642. It is reported that he personally led a Basran contingent at the siege of Ahvāz in 17/638, although one report says that he did not have overall command of the Arab forces there. One version then says that following the fall of Ahvāz Abū Mūsā went on to command the siege of Sūs, accepting the entry of the *asāwera* into Islam after its fall, and thence to Tostar, which fell in 21/642 and in the siege of which he was helped by the *asāwera*. Another version, however, has it that he was ordered to return to Baṣra from Sūs before it fell (Balāḍorī, *Fotūh*, pp. 372-86; Ṭabarī, I, pp. 2551-56, 2562-67).

Similar differences occur in the traditions about the conquest of Fārs. It seems that the conquest of this province was mainly achieved by 'Oṭmān b. Abi'l-'Āš, who began it while he was governor of Oman and Bahrain; but according to some reports Abū Mūsā launched a number of raids from Baṣra into Fārs in support of 'Oṭmān, and that joint forces took Arrajān and Šīrāz, while in 26/647 they jointly subdued a revolt in Sābūr, which 'Oṭmān had earlier conquered



(Balāḍorī, *Fotūḥ*, pp. 387-89). Other traditions about the conquest of Fārs, however, make little mention of Abū Mūsā (Ṭabarī, I, pp. 2694f.).

Abū Mūsā is named too as one of those sent with ʿĪz b. Ġanm to conquer Mesopotamia in 19/640, and one account credits him with the taking of Nisibis, although here again there is a variant which attributes its capture to ʿAbdallāh b. ʿEtbān.

In 21/642 Abū Mūsā is named as the leader of a contingent of Basrans at the decisive battle of Nehāvand which ended organized Sasanian resistance to the Arabs (Ṭabarī, I, p. 2601); following that battle, or perhaps in some cases even before it, several places in Kurdistan and Jebāl are said to have been taken by forces led by or sent by Abū Mūsā—Dīnavar and the whole area to the south of Kermānšāh, Qom, which seems to have been taken by him personally, and Kāšān, taken by al-Aḥnaf b. Qays, whom Abū Mūsā had sent ahead for that purpose (Balāḍorī, *Fotūḥ*, pp. 307, 312-13). The capture of Isfahan especially is the subject of variant traditions. According to one version it was taken as early as 19/640 by forces from Kūfa under ʿAbdallāh b. ʿEtbān. Other reports place its capture in 23/644 and associate it with Abū Mūsā, but even these reports are not unanimous. According to one version Abū Mūsā sent ʿAbdallāh b. Bodayl, who carried out its conquest and became its first Arab governor, while another says that Abū Mūsā himself conquered it after its inhabitants had broken an agreement which they had with him. Yet another account shares the honors between Abū Mūsā and Ebn Bodayl (Balāḍorī, *Fotūḥ*, pp. 312-13; Ṭabarī, I, p. 2640; Abū Noʿaym, *Ketāb dekr aḵbār Eṣbahān: Geschichte Iṣbahān*, Leiden, 1931, pp. 19-30). To some extent these different traditions may reflect the competing claims of Baṣra and Kūfa (see Abū Noʿaym, p. 27.15ff.), or it may be that Isfahan and other towns had to be taken more than once before they were finally subdued.

In spite of much discussion by modern scholars, there are still many unsolved problems concerning the *fetna* (lit. “trial”), the period of dissension and civil war which split the Arabs following the murder of the caliph ʿOṭmān, and some of the most puzzling questions concern Abū Mūsā. When ʿAlī came to Kūfa seeking support against ʿĀʿeša and the Basrans in 36/656, the traditions all agree that Abū Mūsā, who at this time was still governor of Kūfa, urged Kufans not to give their support to ʿAlī and to take no part in the *fetna*. When his advice was rejected and the Kufans went over to ʿAlī, he was therefore forced to leave the town and ʿAlī deposed him from his governorate (Ṭabarī, I, pp. 3143-54, 3172-74). In spite of this, in the following year we find Abū Mūsā



named as the arbitrator (*ḥakam*) chosen by 'Alī's party in accordance with the terms agreed between 'Alī and Mo'āwīa after the battle of Şeffīn. Some of 'Alī's supporters may have foisted him upon 'Alī against his will (Ṭabarī, I, pp. 3333f.). The questions which the two arbitrators were to discuss and the proceedings of the arbitration court are very problematic. There are different traditions which can be harmonized only partially, but in general the picture which emerges from them shows Abū Mūsā being outwitted by the clever and unscrupulous 'Amr b. 'Aṣ, the arbitrator appointed by Mo'āwīa. It seems that 'Amr first persuaded Abū Mūsā to agree publicly that both 'Alī and Mo'āwīa should forfeit the caliphate, but then refused to do the same himself and insisted on the claims of Mo'āwīa (Ṭabarī, I, p. 3354). In consequence the arbitration failed, but with a loss of prestige for 'Alī, and Abū Mūsā withdrew to the Ḥeǰāz, taking no further part in public affairs. In general, scholars have stressed the illogical and unconvincing character of the traditions about the arbitration (J. Wellhausen, *The Arab Kingdom and its Fall*, tr. M. G. Weir, Calcutta, 1927, pp. 90-93), although more recently Mme. Vecchia Vaglieri has argued in favor of them (*EI*² I, s.v. 'Alī b. Abī Ṭāleb). More research is needed into the whole question of the nature of the *fetna*, which may lead to a radical reassessment of the traditions about the arbitration and, consequently, of the part played by Abū Mūsā during this period.

There is little information concerning Abū Mūsā for the period following the *fetna*. A number of different dates are given for his death, the most common being 42/661-62 and 52/672 (Ebn Sa'd, IV/1, p. 86). He is cited as the transmitter of a number of Traditions from the Prophet, and as an authority for the prohibition of the writing down of Hadith (Ebn Sa'd, IV/1, p. 83). A number of Traditions praise the beauty of his Qur'ān recitation, and his name is associated with one of the early versions (*maṣāḥef*) which were eventually superseded by 'Oṭmān's recension. Some of the variants of Abū Mūsā's version have been preserved (A. Jeffery, *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur'ān*, Leiden, 1937, pp. 209-11).

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