



JALULĀ'

JALULĀ', the site of a major battle between the Sasanian and Muslim forces. This locale is a medium-sized town in the Diāla Province of Iraq, situated on the middle course of the Diāla River. In Sassanid times Jalulā' was the center of a subdistrict of Šād Qobād Province, later known as al-'Āl (or al-'Āli) Province (Ostān al-'Āl/'Āli; Ebn Faqih, p. 199). It marked the eastern fringes of the Babylonian *sawād*, with the foothills of the Zagros mountains rising further east. The important Khorasan Road, which linked Ctesiphon to the north-east of the empire, ran through the town and continued to Kāneqin, Qaṣr-e Širin, and Hamadān. Jalulā' is mostly referred to in Islamic sources as the scene of a battle that took place between the invading forces of the Arabs and a Sasanian army.

Setting the contradictory reports in the sources aside, one can take a battle between Persian and Muslim forces at an unspecified date between the fall of Ctesiphon and the battle of Nehāvand for granted. After their defeat at Qādesiya and after the fall of Ctesiphon, (q.v.) or Madā'-en of Islamic sources, the remnants of the Persian army retreated along the Khorasan Road. The Sasanian king, Yazdegerd III, stopped for a while in Ḥolwān, leaving his rear-guard in Jalulā'. The Muslims, on the other hand could not feel safe in Ctesiphon as long as the Persians controlled the eastern *sawād* (i.e., Iraq in early Ar. sources).

Almost every Arab historiographer provides information about “the great battle” of Jalulā', Ḳalifa b. Ḳayyāṭ (p. 108), even calling it the victory of victories (*fath al-fotuhā*), but, as in other cases of the *fotuhā* history, the reports are



highly redundant and contradictory. Therefore, it is hard to extract a convincing description of the events. A likely scenario, relying mainly on Ṭabari's account on the authority of Sayf b. 'Omar, would be: After the conquest of Madā'en (Šafar 16/March 637), the caliph 'Omar b. Kaṭṭāb ordered Sa'd b. Abi Waqqāš to follow the fleeing Persians, and also appointed Sa'd's nephew, Hāšem b. 'Otba the leader of the pursuing forces. A troop of some 12,000 Muslim fighters marched northeast to Jalulā', where a strong Persian army (about 100,000 fighters, clearly an exaggeration, see below) had gathered. They had dug a trench around their position and enforced it with iron-covered stakes. Mehrān Rāzi is often mentioned as the commander of the Persian army. The Muslims laid siege to the stronghold and forced the Persians finally to come out and deliver battle. The Persians were utterly routed, 100,000 of them were killed and only a few escaped the onslaught, which is referred to as *Jalulā' al-waqi'a*. The victors found a tremendous amount of booty in the Persian camp, including a number of women who were taken captive (Ṭabari, I/IV, pp. 2456-60; tr., pp. 36-39; cf. Balāḍori, pp. 264-65; Dinavari, 1960, pp. 127-29). An Arab vanguard was despatched to follow the Persians and reached Ḥolwān, which was taken and garrisoned. The caliph objected to any further advance, saying in a letter to Sa'd: "because I prefer peace for the believers to great booty" (*anfāl*; Ṭabari, I/IV, pp. 2463-64, tr., p. 43; Ebn al-Aṭir, II, p. 363; 2nd ed., III, p. 521). Therefore, the army returned to Madā'en.

One finds a great deal of discrepancies in the accounts of the battle in the primary sources, not to mention some information (e.g., 100,000 Persians killed) that is at best questionable. For instance, most sources refer to Hāšem b. 'Otba as the Arab commander at Jalulā', while, according to Hešām b. Moḥammad Kalbi (apud Balāḍori, p. 265), it was 'Amr b. 'Otba b. Nawfal, the grandson of Sa'd b. Abi Waqqāš, who led the Arab army; Abu Ḥanifa Dinavari (1960, p. 127) mentions 'Amr b. Mālek b. Najaba, and Abu Yusuf give the command to Sa'd b. Abi Waqqāš himself. More outright discrepancies turn up in connection with the names of the commanders of certain contingents, which tend to discredit the entire account. The date of the battle is also given differently in various reports. The earliest date is 14/635 (Ṭabari, I/IV, p. 2359, on Ebn Eshāq's authority and the latest is 19/640, Ya'qubi, II, p. 173). Many authors speak of the end of Du'l-qa'da 16 (Dec. 637), which most modern scholars consider a plausible date of the battle. The Sayf tradition, which features prominently in Ṭabari's account, is centered on the valor of Qa'qā' b. 'Amr (for him, see Zetterstéen). In the Jalulā' saga this so-called Arab hero is



again portrayed as the warrior who almost single-handedly decided the battle by his courage (Ṭabari, I/IV, 2459-61, tr., pp. 38-40). The only author who provides a different story is Ebn Aʿtam Kufi, but he is mostly deemed unreliable.

Hidden under the surface of the seemingly authentic reports lays an abyss of highly questionable information, so that one can discard nearly every detail of the story of Jalulāʾ. Neither is the date certain, nor are the circumstances, the commanders, the number of the fighting troops, or the outcome of the battle (see Noth's study). Furthermore, two standard features of the *fotuhá* reports are missing in the Jalulāʾ stories, namely, the usual obituary of martyred Muslims and the mentioning of any treaty with the local population after the battle.

Noth took the reports about Jalulāʾ as evidence for his observation that Arab authors sometimes constructed a story only to give an explication for an otherwise inexplicable name of a locality, in this case Jalulāʾ, which was traced back to allusions to the Ar. root *ḵ-j-l-l*, which conveys, among others, the meaning "to cover the ground." In order to "cover the ground" with slain bodies, they invented the colossal number of 100,000 Persians killed.

Contrary to the traditional interpretation of Jalulāʾ as a decisive blow to the power of the Persian king, the fighting seems to have been just one more setback in a long run of defeats. For the Muslims the battle of Jalulāʾ was only the final stage of the conquest of the Babylonian *sawād*, but it was not the first stage of the conquest of Iran.

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