



QĀDESIYA, BATTLE OF

QĀDESIYA, BATTLE OF, an engagement during the mid-630s CE in which Arab Muslim warriors overcame a larger Sasanian army and paved the way for their subsequent conquest of Iran. The battle took place at a small settlement on the frontier of Sasanian Iraq. Qādesiya was likely a garrison town in the network of Sasanian fortifications known as the “Wall of the Arabs” (MPers. *war ī tāzīgān*; see Šahrestānīhā ī Ērānšahr, p. 43) or as “Šāpur’s trench” (Ar. *Ḳandaq Sābur*; Ṭabari, I, pp. 2229-30; Yāqut, II, p. 476; Balāḍori, p. 298; Morony, pp. 152-53, 182, no. 6;). The historical sources are unclear regarding both the date of the battle and the sizes of the forces that participated. Although many scholars have proposed the years 636 or 637, Parvaneh Pourshariati has argued for an earlier chronology, based in part upon numismatic evidence that suggests a severe blow to Sasanian administration in 634 or 635 (Pourshariati, pp. 220-22, 469; for a thorough review of the issue of chronology, see Lewental, pp. 232-47). Regarding size, it is unlikely that more than twelve thousand Arab Muslims and thirty thousand Iranians fought each other; one can safely assert only that the Persians outnumbered the invaders (Lewental, pp. 248-63; Donner, pp. 205-8).

According to the Islamic sources, shortly after the victory at Yarmuk in Syria, the caliph ‘Omar b. Ḳaṭṭāb (r. 634-644) turned his attentions to Iraq, dispatching a sizeable army under Sa’d b. Abi Waqqāṣ, which swelled with the addition of local irregulars. The powerful Iranian nobleman and military commander, Rostam b. Farroḳ-Hormozd, was sent at the head of a large army to counter this threat of invasion. The two forces waited several months at



Qādesiya before engaging each other. The traditional account stresses the mission of Muslim envoys, who sought to convert the Persian camp to their new faith, in anecdotes that juxtapose the lavish wealth of the arrogant Iranians with the shabby and unkempt appearance of the pious Muslim soldiers. The annals provide little specifics on the battle itself, focusing instead on heroic tales of fighters (e.g., ‘Amr b. Ma’dikareb and Abu Mehjan Ṭaqafi) and tribes (e.g., Bajila and Tamim). After three days of fighting, a dust storm arose, blowing sand into the Persians’ eyes and enabling their opponents to overpower them. Amidst the gale, a single Arab soldier chanced upon Rostam, whom he promptly attacked and beheaded. His announcement of the general’s death triggered the total collapse of the Iranian army, leading to the deaths of thousands in a chaotic retreat and the capture of the Sasanian royal standard, the *Derafš-e Kāviān*. The Arab Muslim army pursued the fighting remnants of the enemy to the gates of Madā’en, the capital city, which soon fell to the invaders, allowing the swift occupation of the alluvial land of central Iraq. For a few centuries, Qādesiya served as a small way station on the old highway from Baghdad to the Ḥejāz, but it eventually fell into ruin; its actual location was largely forgotten until its rediscovery in 1912 (Musil, 1913, p. 11; idem, 1927, pp. 107-11, 117, 358).

In Islamic historiography, the account of the Battle of Qādesiya occupies a prominent place; for instance, Ṭabari has devoted 167 pages to this battle. Yet, the bulk of the source material consists of embellishments and topoi that obscure the kernel of historical truth. Confusion of details — for instance, dead Muslim warriors being resurrected in subsequent battles, or the *derafš* being seized twice more, at Madā’en and at Nehāvand — complicates the picture and highlights the role of story-tellers in the narrative’s genesis and development.

Much of the material on Qādesiya can be found in the Arabic-language annals; some of the earliest extant references are in works by Abu Yusof (d. 182/798) and Yaḥyā b. Āam (fl. ca. 757/758-818), followed by Ebn Ḳayyāṭ ‘Oṣfori (d. 240/854; pp. 108-23) and Ebn A’ṭam Kufi (fl. 2nd-3rd/8th-9th; pp. 195-214). Subsequent historians, such as Balāḍori (d. 279/892; pp. 255-62), Dinavari (d. 282/895; pp. 125-33), Ṭabari (d. 311/923; I, pp. 2209-377), and Mas‘udi (d. 335/946; secs. 1538-57), provided more elaborate accounts. Starting in the 10th century, Persian-language writers, especially Abu ‘Ali Bal‘ami (d. 364/974; pp. 292-302), Ferdowsi (d. 411/1020; ed. Khaleghi-Motlaq, VIII, pp. 410 ff.), and Abu Maṣṣur Ṭa‘ālebi (d. 429/1037), began to contribute. Later historians writing in



Arabic or Persian, such as Yāqut (d. 626/1229; IV, pp. 7-9), Ebn al-Atīr (d. 630/1233; II, pp. 448 ff.), Abu'l-Fedā' (d. 732/1331), Ebn Kāldun (d. 808/1046), Mirkvānd, (d. 903/1498; II, pp. 673 ff.) and his grandson Kvāndamir (d. 943/1536; I, pp. 481-83), base themselves mainly upon prior extant texts. The earliest known mention of the battle appears in the Armenian history of Sebēos (d. ca 661; I, pp. 98-99). Yet, although other non-Muslim sources (in Armenian, Georgian, Syriac, Greek, and Arabic) comment on Qādesiya, an exhaustive source review concluded that they provide little information, repeating, like the Muslim sources, common themes and topoi, but with a focus on ecclesiastical priorities (Lewental, pp. 264-301).

A number of modern scholars (esp. Noth, Conrad, Morony, Donner, and Pourshariati) have examined Qādesiya within the context of broader studies, and many ideas distilled from the larger body of scholarship can be applied to the battle. Scholars agree that most details were fabricated by storytellers and traditionists according to a common schema of how they imagined battles should have taken place. Nevertheless, in a study on Qādesiya, Lewental (pp. 121-231) identified a few unique elements in the narrative: namely, the local geography, the illness and absence of Sa'd and the interconnected tale of Abu Meḥjan, the death of Rostam, and possibly the presence of elephants and the *derafš* at the battlefield. Lewental argued (pp. 315-26) that, although subsequent memory has telescoped the conquest of Iran into this one battle, Qādesiya was not conclusive; it was followed by two major engagements at *Jalulā'* and *Nehāvand*; and, despite decades of external and internal warfare and financial bankruptcy, Iran succeeded in offering stiff and sustained resistance for many years.

In modern times, the memory of Qādesiya underwent substantial manipulation at the hands of Ṣaddām Ḥosayn, who fashioned it into a paradigm of Iraqi-Iranian relations during the Iran-Iraq War (see [IRAQ vii](#)) termed Ṣaddām's Qādesiya (Ar. *Qādesiyat-Ṣaddām*) in official rhetoric (Lewental, pp. 388-450; idem, forthcoming; Bengio, pp. 172-5; Davis, pp. 176-99). Although Iraq emphasized the battle as an ethnic clash between Arabs and Persians, the leaders of the Islamic Republic of Iran responded largely by celebrating Qādesiya as a victory for their ideological ancestors who brought Islam to Iran. Qādesiya lives on in the rhetoric of radical Islamists, who find inspiration in the victory of the "few against the many" and the success of pious believers against the superpowers of the age (Lewental, pp. 453-62). Qādesiya nomenclature can be found spread throughout the Middle



East and beyond; an expanding database of examples is located online (DGL Notes, <http://DGLnotes.com/notes/qadisiyyah3.htm>).

See also ARAB ii. Arab Conquest of Iran.

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