

Expansion of the Islamic Empire – Primary Source Readings

Document A: Battle of the Yarmuk (Excerpted from Original)

A description of the battle. Heraclius gathered large bodies of Greeks, Syrians, Mesopotamians and Armenians numbering about 200,000. This army he put under the command of one of his choice men and sent as a vanguard Jabalah ibn-al-Aiham al-Ghassani at the head of the "naturalized" Arabs [musta'ribah] of Syria of the tribes of Lakhm, Judham and others, resolving to fight the Moslems so that he might either win or withdraw to the land of the Greeks and live in Constantinople. The Muslims gathered together and the Greek army marched against them. The battle they fought at al-Yarmuk was of the fiercest and bloodiest kind. Al-Yarmuk [Hieromax] is a river. In this battle 24,000 Moslems took part. The Greeks and their followers in this battle tied themselves to each other by chains, so that no one might set his hope on flight. By Allah's help, some 70,000 of them were put to death, and their remnants took to flight, reaching as far as Palestine, Antioch, Aleppo, Mesopotamia and Armenia. In the battle of al-Yarmuk certain Moslem women took part and fought violently. Among them was Hind, daughter of 'Utbah and mother of Mu'awiyah ibn-abi-Sufyan, who repeatedly exclaimed, "Cut the arms of these 'uncircumcised', with your swords!" Her husband abu-Sufyan had come to Syria as a volunteer desiring to see his sons, and so he brought his wife with him. He then returned to al-Madinah where he died, year 31, at the age of 88. Others say he died in Syria. When the news of his death was carried to his daughter, umm-Habibah, she waited until the third day on which she ordered some yellow paint and covered with it her arms and face saying, "I would not have done that, had I not heard the Prophet say, 'A woman should not be in mourning for more than three days over anyone except her husband.'" It is stated that she did likewise when she received the news of her brother Yazid's death. But Allah knows best.

[. . .]

The story of Jabalali. Jabalah ibn-al-Aiham sided with the Ansar saying, "Ye are our brethren and the sons of our fathers," and professed Islam. After the arrival of 'Umar ibn-al-Khattab in Syria, year 17, Jabalah had a dispute with one of the Muzainah and knocked out his eye. 'Umar ordered that he be punished, upon which Jabalah said, "Is his eye like mine? Never, by Allah, shall I abide in a town where I am under authority." He then apostatized and went to the land of the Greeks. This Jabalah was the king of Ghassan and the successor of al-Harith ibn-abi-Shimr.

According to another report, when Jabalah came to 'Umar ibn-al-Khattab, he was still a Christian. 'Umar asked him to accept Islam and pay sadakah [a Muslim alms tax] but he refused saying, "I shall keep my faith and pay sadakah." 'Umar's answer was, "If thou keepest thy faith, thou least to pay poll-tax". The man refused, and 'Umar added, "We have only three alternatives for thee: Islam tax or going whither thou wilt." Accordingly, Jabalah left with 30,000 men to the land of the Greeks [Asia Minor]. 'Ubadah ibn-as-Samit gently reproved 'Umar saying, "If thou hadst accepted sadakah from him and treated him in a friendly way, he would have become Moslem."

In the year 21, 'Umar directed 'Uthman ibn-Sa'd al-Ansari at the head of a great army against the land of the Greeks, and put him in command of the summer expedition which was the first of its kind. 'Umar instructed him to treat Jabalah ibn-al-Aiham very, kindly, and to try and appeal to him through the blood relationship between them, 'so that he should come back to the land of the Moslems with the understanding that he would keep his own faith and pay the amount of sadakah he had agreed to pay. 'Uthman marched until he came to the land of the Greeks and proposed to Jabalah what he was ordered by 'Umar to propose; but Jabalah refused the offer and insisted on staying in the land of the Greeks. 'Umar then came into a place called al-Himar-a valley-- which he destroyed putting its inhabitants to the sword. Hence the proverb, "In a more ruined state than the hollow of Himar."

Christians and Jews prefer Moslem rule. Abu-Hafs ad-Dimashki from Sa'id ibn-'Abd-al-'Aziz: -When Heraclius massed his troops against the Moslems and the Moslems heard that they were coming to meet them at al-Yarmuk, the Moslems refunded to the inhabitants of Hims the karaj [tribute] they had taken from them saying, "We are too busy to support and protect you. Take care of yourselves." But the people of Hims replied, "We like your rule and justice far better than the state of oppression and tyranny in which we were. The army of Heraclius we shall indeed, with your 'amil's' help, repulse from the city." The Jews rose and said, "We swear by the Torah, no governor of Heraclius shall enter the city of Hims unless we are first vanquished and exhausted!"

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Saying this, they closed the gates of the city and guarded them. The inhabitants of the other cities - Christian and Jew - that had capitulated to the Moslems, did the same, saying, "If Heraclius and his followers win over the Moslems we would return to our previous condition, otherwise we shall retain our present state so long as numbers are with the Moslems." When by Allah's help the "unbelievers" were defeated and the Moslems won, they opened the gates of their cities, went out with the singers and music players who began to play, and paid the kharaj.

Source: *Al-Biladuri, "The Battle of the Yarmuk (636) and After," written in the 800s CE.*

Document B: The Treaty of Tudmir

In the name of God, the merciful and compassionate.

This is a document [granted] by 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn Musa ibn Nusair to Tudmir, son of Ghabdush, establishing a treaty of peace and the promise and protection of God and his Prophet (may God bless him and grant him peace). We ['Abd al-'Aziz] will not set special conditions for him or for any among his men, nor harass him, nor remove him from power. His followers will not be killed or taken prisoner, nor will they be separated from their women and children. They will not be coerced in matters of religion, their churches will not be burned, nor will sacred objects be taken from the realm, [so long as] he [Tudmir] remains sincere and fulfills the [following] conditions that we have set for him. He has reached a settlement concerning seven towns: Orihuela, Valentilla, Alicante, Mula, Bigastro, Ello, and Lorca. He will not give shelter to fugitives, nor to our enemies. He and [each of] his men shall [also] pay one dinar every year, together with four measures of wheat, four measures of barley, four liquid measures of concentrated fruit juice, four liquid measures of vinegar, four of honey, and four of olive oil. Slaves much each pay half of this amount.

Source: *The Treaty of Tudmir, 713 CE.*

Document C: Fred Donner (Excerpted from Original)

In fact, the means used by the state to integrate the tribal population of Arabia to itself during the conquests were highly varied, and some tended to be more effective than others in binding particular individuals or groups to the state. They ranged in character from the purely ideological or idealistic to the crassly venal, and it is no doubt the very breadth of this spectrum of inducements to loyalty, all tied up in one way or another with the Islamic regime, that made the integration process so successful.

On the purely ideological plane, the same factors that had assisted the process of political integration under Muhammad continued to function during the conquest period, notably the impetus to political unification and centralization implicit in Islam's concepts of a universal, unique God, of an overriding moral authority established by God and expressed in revelations granted His Apostle and in the unity of the Islamic community. As under Muhammad, these factors led those individuals who were, for whatever personal or psychological reasons, strongly attracted to the religious message of Islam also to the conviction that a thorough political and social unification under the guiding principles of Islam was desirable or even morally necessary. Although Muhammad's successors could not claim, like him, to be prophets blessed with a direct link to a God who was viewed as the ultimate source of all the validating precepts of Islam, the fact that they represented the communal leadership of the new polity that was guided by those precepts lent them great moral and political authority. The importance of a sincere belief in the religious precepts of early Islam, then, must not be underestimated when considering the rise of the Islamic state to supremacy in Arabia or the conquests that the expansion of that state generated. Because the impact of such beliefs depended so much on the frame of mind of individual believers, about which there remains no trace of documentary evidence (e.g., letters, memoirs, or the like), the religious motivation to political loyalty and unity is difficult to assess in individual cases. The historian, furthermore, here comes face to face with the impossible task of explaining in historical terms not what people believe, but why some should choose to believe in particular ideological

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systems even when to do so may at times threaten their material or other personal interests. Although we cannot hope to explain the mystery of human faith, however, we can point to its undeniable role in human affairs; and even if not every Muslim was so inspired, there can be little doubt that some Muslims, in their zeal to do well by the new religious and social dispensation of Islam, would have clung firm to the Islamic state and fought for its interests to the death. Depending on the individual, then, the ideology of Islam itself could serve as an important factor contributing to the successful integration of the Islamic state.

In addition to the ideological factors, however, there were also the many practical means by which the loyalty of various individuals was secured by the Islamic state. As under Muhammad, for example, the promise of material gain in the form of booty or other rewards was doubtless still an effective inducement for many tribesmen to remain loyal. Indeed, the great scope of the conquests, and the relative success of some campaigns, could be expected to have made the prospects of securing considerable booty quite promising, at least for a time. But during the conquest period the granting of gifts, which had been practiced by Muhammad, became more regularized and eventually institutionalized. In the first place, there was established a system of stipends or direct salary payments ('ata-') to warriors serving in the Islamic armies, at least by the time of 'Umar b. al-Khassab. The stipend payments, because they were predictable, created a direct and enduring link between the interests of those recruited into the Islamic armies and the interests of the state and the ruling elite in a way that merely sharing in the distribution of booty from a successful campaign could not. Moreover, tribesmen in the Islamic armies who rebelled against the regime now did so at the cost of losing the stipends that the regime provided. The 'ata-' was graded in order to reflect the priority of an individual's adherence to Islam; in Iraq, as we have seen, the immigrant tribesmen were organized into pay units called 'irafas, according to the time of their arrival in Iraq. Those who had fought under Khalid b. al-Walid in the first phase of the conquest there (the so-called ahl al-ayyam) received the highest stipends, those who came in the second phase somewhat less, and those who arrived only with the third phase (called the ahl al-Qa-disiyya) or even later, in one of the rawadif migrations, received still less. This schedule was not rigidly tied to military performance or priority in joining Islam, however; sometimes an unusually generous stipend was awarded in recognition of the special status of the recipient -- as in the case of the Prophet's widows and numerous early Muslims in Medina, who took no part in the military activity on the fronts-- or to guarantee the loyalty of individuals or groups whose services seemed especially desirable. Most notable among the latter were some of the asawira or Persian cavalry, once part of the Sasanian garrisons in Iraq, who appear to have changed sides at a fairly early date and joined the Islamic armies. They were rewarded by being granted the highest level of stipend (sharafal- 'ata-'), two thousand dirhams per annum. They indeed proved useful allies and served beside the Muslims at al-Qadisiyya, Jalula', and in Khuzistan, as well as providing troops to guard the outlying garrisons the Muslims established at Hulwan, Masabadhan, Mosul, and al-Qarqisiya'. Similarly, stipends were granted to some Persian or Aramean petty nobles (dihqans) who cooperated with the Muslims in Iraq. In most cases, it appears that these individuals were required to embrace Islam in order to receive their stipend.

Source: *Excerpt from Fred Donner, The Early Islamic Conquests, 1981.*