

KRZYSZTOF KOŚCIELNIAK
(Jagiellonian University, Cracow, Poland)
ORCID: 0000-0002-3915-335X

**A Battle or a Campaign?
Historical Facts about the Battle of Al-Qādisiyya (636/637?)
and the Role of Story-tellers in the Origin of its Narratives**

Abstract

The paper presents how the pluralism of relations in the early Muslim sources concerning the memory the Qādisiyya narrative is problematic for reconstructing the event of the battle by modern scholars. Specific studies of the early Islamic sources concerning the Battle of Al-Qādisiyya lead to the conclusion that it is certainly easier to interpret the functions of particular *topoi* than to determinate the facts about the *Ma'rakat al-Qādisiyya*. The main, unsolved questions related to the Qādisiyyah narrative are the uncertainty of the date of the battle, the size of the Muslim and Persian forces that fought in the *Ma'rakat al-Qādisiyya* as well as some contradictions and different presentations of the battle. Scholars have undertaken many attempts to make the conflicting accounts more coherent but in fact, they only made some speculations or, at the best, case scenario – explanations made on the basis of limited and uncertain evidence. For these reasons, the paper contains the suggestion to avoid an undue emphasis on the importance of the *Ma'rakat al-Qādisiyya* and to replace this term by the more general expression “the Mesopotamian campaign 634–637.” The critical evaluation of the Muslim sources leads to a more general description of the Battle of Al-Qādisiyya as an element of the campaign (stage 634–637) whose unambiguous evaluation is impossible.

Keywords: the Battle of Al-Qādisiyya, the early Islamic historiography, Aṭ-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rīḥ*, *aḥbār*-stories, the Muslim conquest of Persia, Sasanids, 'ulamā', *adab*-tradition, *topoi* of early Islam, critical historical researches

It is considered that the Battle of Yarmūk (636) against the Byzantines and the Battle of Al-Qādisiyya (*Maʿrakat al-Qādisiyya* 636[?]) against the Sasanian Persians decided the fate of the Middle East. Taken together, according to many interpretations – they changed the course of world history. Traditionally, the essential difference between the consequences of these battles was seen as follows: the Battle of Yarmūk powerfully weakened the Byzantine Empire, while the Battle of Al-Qādisiyya ended the Persian Empire. For this reason, historians have concentrated on analyzing *Maʿrakat al-Qādisiyya* – more specifically on the reconstruction of this great Arab military victory of 636/637[?].¹ However, for many scholars the Muslim sources concerning this battle have not proved to be sufficient and fully reliable.

Contemporary historians question a great part of the historical material included in the Islamic chronicles for the Arab conquest period as untrustworthy for several reasons. Firstly, it is stressed that these texts were compiled hundreds of years after the described event. Secondly, it is difficult to corroborate many information with external sources of non-Muslim provenance. Thirdly, most scholars have found the *taʿrīḥ* difficult to read because it seems to lack a major theme. For example, Abū Ḡaʿfar Muḥammad Ibn Ḡarīr at-Ṭabarī (839–923)² failed to ‘portray (following Aristotle’s language) a single action as a unified story leading up to a clear dramatic resolution.’³ Moreover, it is not really 100 percent clear to what extent the proposed critical methods could be actually implemented to determine historical facts concerning the *Maʿrakat al-Qādisiyya*. This paper is not, naturally, a new inventory of the details, contradictions and the distinctive elements in the Qādisiyyah narrative that do not appear largely in the accounts of other works belonging to the category *futūḥ*. It aims at answering the question in what ways the pluralism of relations in early Muslim sources concerning the memory the Qādisiyya narrative is problematic for reconstructing the events of this battle by modern scholars. The paper also contains a proposal of a description of the language related to the changes in the Middle East during 634–637 as a consequence of the scholars’ research results.

¹ See *inter alia*: M. Sharon, *The Decisive Battles in the Arab Conquest of Syria*, “Studia Orientalia” 101 (2004), pp. 297–357; A.-L. de Prémare, *Les éléphants de Qādisiyya*, “Arabica” 45/2 (1998), pp. 261–269; D. Gershon Lewental, “Qādisiyyah, Then and Now: A Case Study of History and Memory, Religion, and Nationalism in Middle Eastern Discourse” (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 2011); Abd al-Husain Zarrinkub, *The Arab Conquest of Iran and Its Aftermath*, in: A.J. Arberry (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 4, R.N. Frye (ed.), *The period from the Arab invasion to the Saljuqs*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1975, pp. 1–56; P. Pourshariati, *Decline and Fall of the Sasanian Empire: The Sasanian-Parthian Confederacy and the Arab Conquest of Iran*, London and New York, I.B. Tauris 2008, pp. 157; 232–234; 269; O. Hanne, *Les seuils du Moyen-Orient, Histoire des frontières et des territoires*, Paris, Éditions du Rocher 2017, p. 538; E. Burke, *Shahanshah: A Study of Monarchy of Iran*, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass 1979, pp. 12–13; T. Daryaei, *Sasanian Persia: The Rise and Fall of an Empire*, London, I.B.Tauris 2014, p. 37.

² See: Abū Ḡaʿfar Muḥammad Ibn Ḡarīr at-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Tabari*, vol. 12: *The Battle of al-Qādisiyyah and the Conquest of Syria and Palestine*, ed. Yohanan Friedmann, New York, State University of New York Press 1992.

³ See: R. Stephen Humphreys, *Islamic History: A Framework for Inquiry. Revised Edition*, London, Tauris 1991, p. 129.

a) The classic Islamic sources about *Ma'rakat al-Qādisiyya* and their peculiar nature

Using the historical-critical methods contemporary scholars undermine a lot of information about the Battle of al-Qādisiyya related by medieval Islamic historiography. Their criticism primarily concerns the evaluation and interpretation of the historical materials given by the early Arabic-language annals (8th–10th centuries), such as the works by Aṭ-Ṭabarī (839–923),⁴ by Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb Ibn Ibrāhīm Ibn Ḥabīb al-Kūfī (731–798),⁵ by Ibn Ḥayyāt al-'Uṣfūrī (777–854),⁶ by Aḥmad Ibn Yaḥyā Ibn Ḡābir al-Balāḍurī (d. 892),⁷ by Abu 'Alī Muḥammad Ibn Muḥammad al-Bal'amī (d. 974),⁸ by Abū Ḥanīfa ad-Dīnawarī (d. between 894–903)⁹ and by Ibn A'ṭam al-Kūfī (d. ca 926).¹⁰ Secondly, the critical investigation in the Persian/Arabic-language annals written during period of the 10th–12th centuries have added very little to the historical reconstruction of the Battle of Al-Qādisiyya. The works by Abū 'Alī Muḥammad Ibn Muḥammad Bal'amī, (d. between 966 and 974),¹¹ by Abū al-Qāsim Ferdawsī (940–1020)¹² and by Abū Mansūr at-Ta'ālībī (d. 1037)¹³ were strongly marked by the ethno-national Persian identity; they often show the past in order to improve the present. They focus on a wide variety of moral virtues. Later authors presenting *Ma'rakat al-Qādisiyya* in Arabic or Persian were profoundly depended on the information provided by the earlier chronicles, creating a new type of compilation. This is the characteristic of the descriptions of Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī ar-Rūmī

⁴ See Abū Ḡā'far Muḥammad Ibn Ḡarīr at-Ṭabarī, the Arabic text – *Annales quos scripsit Abu Djarfar Mohammed ibn Djarir at-Tabari*, ed. M.J. de Goeje, Leiden, Brill 1879–1881, English text – *The History of al-Tabari*, vol. 12: *The Battle of al-Qadisiyyah and the Conquest of Syria and Palestine...*, pp. 95–97; 110–175.

⁵ See Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb Ibn Ibrāhīm, *Kitāb al-Ḥarāğ*, ed. 'Abd ar-Rahmān Ibn Rağab, Bayrūt, Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1979, pp. 29, 31, 41, 142.

⁶ See: Ibn Ḥayyāt al-'Uṣfūrī, *Ta'rīḥ Ḥalīfa Ibn Ḥayyāt*, ed. Suhayl Zakkār, vol. 1, Dimašq, Ihyā' at-Turāt al-Qadīm 1967, pp. 108–123.

⁷ See Aḥmad Ibn Yaḥyā al-Balāḍurī, *Futūḥ al-Buldān*, Bayrūt, Dār al-Našr li-al-Ġāmi'iyyīn 1957, pp. 255–262.

⁸ See Abu 'Alī Muḥammad Ibn Muḥammad al-Bal'amī, *Tarğame-ye Tāriḥ-e Ṭabari: qesmat marbuṭ bā Irān*, ed. Moḥammad Ġawād Maškūr, Tehrān, 1958, pp. 292–302.

⁹ See Abu Ḥanīfa Dinavari, *Ketāb aḥbār at-tewāl*, ed. Vladimir Guirgass, Leiden, 1888, pp. 125–133.

¹⁰ See Ibn A'ṭam al-Kūfī, *Ketāb al-fotuḥ*, ed. Moḥammad 'Abd al-Mo'īd Ḥān, Maḥāmed 'Alī 'Abbāsī, and Sayyed 'Abd al-Wahhāb Boḥārī, vol. I, Hyderabad 1968, pp. 195–214.

¹¹ See Abū 'Alī Muḥammad Ibn Muḥammad Bal'amī, *Tarğame-ye Ta'rīḥ-e Ṭabari az Abū-'Alī Muḥammad Bal'amī: qisimat marbuṭ be-Īrān bā muqaddame wa-ḥawāsi be-ihtimām-e Muḥammad Ġawād Maškūr*, Tehrān, Kitāb Furūs-e Ḥayyām 1958, pp. 292–302.

¹² See Abū al-Qāsim Ferdawsī, *Shāhnāme-ye Ferdawsī: az rū-ye čāp-e Wüllirs, pas az muqābale bā nusaḥ-e ḥaṭṭī-ye dīgār wa-tarğome-ye ḥawāsi-ye Lāīnī-ye ān be-Fārsī*, vol. 5, section 9: *Az Āğāz-e pādīšāhī-ye Ḥusraw Parvīz tā pāyān-e ketāb*, Tehrān, Kitābhāne wa-Čāphāne-ye Birūḥīm 1937, pp. 2962–2979.

¹³ See Abū Mansūr at-Ta'ālībī, *Ta'rīḥ ġurar as-siyar al-ma'rūf bi-Kitāb ġurar aḥbār mulūk al-Fars wa-siyarihīm*, reprint, Tehrān, Maktabat al-Asadī, 1963 [1900].

(1179–1229),¹⁴ ‘Alī Ibn Muḥammad Ibn al-Aḫ̄ir (1160–1233),¹⁵ Mirḥānd (1433–1495)¹⁶ and his grandson Ġiyāt ad-Dīn Muḥammad Ḥāndamir (1475–1534).¹⁷

Christian medieval historiography (for example Maḥbūb Ibn Qusṭanīn from the 10th century)¹⁸ would not be of much use to determine the details of the Battle of Al-Qādisiyya even though one of these sources comes from the very early period of the Muslim era (that is *Patmowt’iwn i Herakln – Armenian history of Sebēos* [d. ca 661?]).¹⁹ The Christian sources in Armenian, Georgian, Syriac, Greek and Arabic describing the Battle of al-Qādisiyya usually repeat information from the Muslim sources as well as common themes and *topoi*, focusing on their ecclesiastical elements.²⁰

In this way, we are doomed to use primarily the Islamic (not Christian) sources dealing with the reality of *Ma’rakat al-Qādisiyya*. However, for the last several decades historians have stressed the peculiar nature of the most important works of classical-historical Islamic literature, especially *Ta’rīḥ ar-rusul wa-al-mulūk* by Aṭ-Ṭabarī. The medieval chronicles seem to be fragmentary compilations in which the author’s intentions are often unclear and difficult to provide an unambiguous interpretation.²¹

The Battle of al-Qādisiyya can be seen as one of the classic examples of the metamorphosis of the event into a legend. A new and pioneering deconstruction of *Ma’rakat al-Qādisiyya* narrative by reading the early Islamic conquest literature was done by Gershon Lewental. His thorough analysis considers not only the exploration

¹⁴ See Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Kitāb al-Muṣṭarīk waḍ’an wa-al-muṣṭarīq ṣuq’an*, ed. F. Wüstenfeld, Fränkfurt [Main], Ma’had Tārīḥ al-‘Ulūm al-‘Arabiyya wa-al-Islāmiyya 1994, vol. 4, pp. 7–9, 42–43.

¹⁵ See ‘Alī Ibn Muḥammad Ibn al-Aḫ̄ir, *Al-Kāmil fī tāriḥ*, ed. C. J. Tornberg, vol. II, Bayrūt, Dār Ṣādir 1965, pp. 448–489.

¹⁶ See Mirḥānd, *Rawḍat aṣ-ṣafā*, ed. Ġamshīd Kiyānfar, Tehrān 2001, vol. 2, pp. 1778–1789.

¹⁷ See Ḳāndamir, *Ta’rīḥ Ḥabīb as-siyar*, ed. Moḥammad Dabirsiyāqī, 3rd edition, Tehrān 1983, vol. 1, pp. 477–483.

¹⁸ See Agapios of Hierapolis, *Kitāb al-Unwān: Histoire universelle, écrite par Agapius (Mahboub) de Menbidj: Seconde partie (II)*, Paris, *Patrologia Orientalis* 8/38, 1912, pp. 469–470.

¹⁹ See Sebēos, *The Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*, tr. R.W. Thomson, Liverpool, University Press 1999, vol. 1, pp. 98–99.

²⁰ See D. Gershon Lewental, *Qādisiyyah, Then and Now: A Case Study of History and Memory, Religion, and Nationalism in Middle Eastern Discourse...*, pp. 264–301.

²¹ See U. Mårtensson, *Discourse and Historical Analysis: The Case of al-Ṭabarī’s History of the Messengers and the Kings*, “Journal of Islamic Studies” 16 (2005), pp. 287–331; S.C. Judd, *Narratives and Character Development: al-Ṭabarī and al-Balādhūrī on Late Umayyad History*, in: ed. S. Günther, *Ideas, Images and Methods of Portrayal: Insights into Classical Arabic Literature and Islam*, Leiden, Brill 2005, pp. 209–225; B. Shoshan, *Poetics of Islamic Historiography: Deconstructing Ṭabarī’s ‘History’*, Leiden, Brill 2004, pp. 109–154; J.B. Roberts, *Early Islamic Historiography: Ideology and Methodology*, PhD thesis Ohio State University, 1986; A.I. Tayob, *Tabari on the Companions of the Prophet: Moral and Political Contours in Islamic Historical Writing*, “Journal of the American Oriental Society” 119 (1999), pp. 203–210; Ch.F. Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, Cambridge, Cambridge UP 2003, pp. 35–36; M. Vogt, *Figures de califes entre histoire et fiction: Al-Walīd b. Yazīd et al-Amīn dans la représentation de l’historiographie arabe de l’époque ‘abbāsīde*, Würzburg, Ergon 2006.

of the meanings, but also the role of history, memory, time and religion.²² In fact, his interdisciplinary approach is a relevant feature of this research. It gives the possibility for scholars to extend the proposed interpretations onto the different areas of the Battle of Al-Qādisiyya.

However, it is still an open question in the ground of critical-historical research how early Islamic history should be understood and analyzed. In fact, the conception of history which looked like a simple collection of facts and events from the medieval chronicles was abandoned a long time ago. Criticism, analysis and comparison are now directed towards a better understanding of the reality of the early Islamic state and the methodology of writing Islamic history by medieval Muslim authors.

The perspectives and limitations of the classic Muslim chroniclers resulted from several factors. Firstly, presenting history the authors aimed at drawing historical lessons. They usually based their texts on the Qur'anic verse *la-qad kāna fī qaṣaṣihim 'ibratun li-ūli l'albāb /.../* (12,111). Their chief objective in presenting Islamic history was to give a religious interpretation of the victories and disasters that took place in the Muslim world. The adoption of the Qur'anic perspective caused that most important interpretations became the attitudes of the tribes and nations towards God (Islam).²³ This manner can be seen in numerous presentations of *Ma'rakat al-Qādisiyya*.

The peculiar nature of the Islamic historiography is also revealed in the ambivalences of the Islamic historical narratives. Some, especially early Islamic, historians concentrated more on general narratives. Their analyses and commentaries were poor. On the other hand, there appeared another much dangerous tendency, namely historical narrations paying no attention to the sequence of historical events.²⁴ The critical approach stresses that when historical events are not properly analyzed and understood they may have been acts of naivety and are not themselves conducive to historical certainty, which can be confusing. It is understood that creation is the heart of culture. However, isolating events from the whole context of other events, which is typical of some medieval relations, gives their incomplete image. All these problems also concern the factual history of the Battle of Al-Qādisiyya (on the other hand, it is not an isolated example because no past phenomena or processes can be depicted as a 100 percent factual history).

²² See D. Gershon Lewental, *Qādisiyyah, Then and Now: A Case Study of History and Memory, Religion, and Nationalism in Middle Eastern Discourse...*, pp. 14–374; 466–490.

²³ F. Grine and other, *Islamic Historical Writing: A Critical Analysis*, “Middle-East Journal of Scientific Research” 13/3 (2013), p. 304.

²⁴ See A. Šalabī, *Mawsū'at at-ta'rīḥ al-islāmī wa-al-ḥadāra al-islāmiyya dirāsāt taḥlīliyya šāmila fī 'ašarat aġzā' li-ta'rīḥ al-'ālam al-islāmī kullihī min maṭla' al-islām ḥattā al-ān, ma'a dirāsāt al-ġawānib al-ḥadāriyya allatī ašama bihā al-muslimūna fī tarqīyat al-'umrān wa-taṭwīr al-fikr al-bašarī*, Al-Qāhira, Maktabat an-Nahḍa al-Miṣriyya 1982, pp. 264–270.

b) *Aḥbār* and topoi of the Battle of Al-Qādisiyya

Many modern scholars, for example, Fred McGraw Donner (born 1945),²⁵ Albrecht Noth (1937–1999),²⁶ Lawrence Conrad (born 1949),²⁷ Michael Morony (born 1939),²⁸ Parvaneh Pourshariati (born 1959)²⁹ and the already mentioned Gershon Lewental in his dissertation (2011),³⁰ have examined *Ma'rakat al-Qādisiyya* within the framework of detailed studies showing how some ideas and schemas were applied to narration about the Battle of Al-Qādisiyya. Historians agree that most details presented by Muslim sources were fabricated by storytellers and traditionalists according to a common schema of how they imagined battles should have taken place.

It was signaled that this imagination was strictly linked with the some manners of the medieval Arabic historical works. More specifically, the Arabic historiography was certainly not strongly connected with *ta'rīḥ*, the annalistic chronicling of events from the year, which is nowadays translated into Arabic term “history.” For several decades scholars have been exploring the nature of the so-called *ḥabar*-history (or plural *aḥbār*-histories) which were kinds of reports about significant past events.³¹ The historical work under the title *aḥbār* was created especially from the eighth and ninth centuries. However, later chronicle using the title *ta'rīḥ* from the tenth century continued the *aḥbār* forms.³² For this reason, the Battle of Al-Qādisiyya must be examined in the light of some key Islam motif. A great role was played by the status of the Prophet's companions and the peculiar form of Islamic history – *aḥbār* report (with *isnād*, a list of authorities who transmitted this report).

It shall be pointed out that the medieval Muslim world deeply explored the nature of *ḥabar* in systematic studies, *inter alia* in the frame of the work *Al-Muḡnī fi abwāb at-tawḥīd wa-al-'adl* by the Mu'tazilite theologian 'Imād al-Dīn Abū al-Ḥasan 'Abd

²⁵ See F. McGraw Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests*, Princeton, Princeton University Press 1981.

²⁶ See A. Noth, *Quellenkritische Studien zu Themen, Formen und Tendenzen frühislamischer, Geschichtsüberlieferung*, Bonn, Orientalistisches Seminar der Universität 1973. See also critical remarks about the early Islamic conquests: A. Noth, *Futūḥ – History and Futūḥ – Historiography: the Muslim Conquest of Damascus*, “Al-Qanṭara” 10 (1989), pp. 453–462; A. Noth, *Iṣfahān-Nihāvand. Eine quellenkritische Studie zur frühislamischen Historiographie*, “Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft” 118 (1968), pp. 274–296; A. Noth, L.I. Conrad, *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition. A Source-Critical Study*, in: *Studies in late antiquity and early Islam* 3, Princeton, Darwin Press 1994.

²⁷ See L.I. Conrad, *The Chain Topos*, “Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam” 31 (2006), pp. 1–33.

²⁸ See M.G. Morony, *The Effects of the Muslim Conquest on the Persian Population of Iraq*, “Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies” 14 (1976), pp. 41–59.

²⁹ See P. Pourshariati, *Decline and Fall of the Sasanian Empire...*, pp. 11, 35, 157, 186, 197, 216, 220, 222, 224, 226, 228, 230–236, 242, 244, 257, 269, 291, 469.

³⁰ See D. Gershon Lewental, *Qādisiyyah, Then and Now: A Case Study of History and Memory...*, pp. 327–374.

³¹ See M. Brett, *Introduction* to: Ahmed ibn Mohammed al-Makkari, *The History of the Mohammedan Dynasties in Spain*, transl. P. de Gayangos, London, Routledge 2002, vol. I, p. XVIII.

³² See U. Mårtensson, *Discourse and Historical Analysis: The Case of al-Ṭabarī's History...*, p. 290.

al-Ġabbār Ibn Aḥmad al-Hamaḍānī (ca. 936–1024).³³ This philosophical treaty shows how important *aḥbār* was in the fields of religion, philosophy and history at this time. ‘Abd al-Ġabbār extracted firstly *ḥabar* which was to lead readers to necessary knowledge (1). As proof of the credibility of this *ḥabar* he proposed *isnāds* (the chains of trustworthy people who transmitted the information) at least four reliable transmitters who reported what they had known by necessity. Secondly, the author distinguished *ḥabar* (2) whose truth is known by inference (*istidlāl*). In the frame of this kind of *ḥabar* ‘Abd al-Ġabbār three *aḥbār*: *ḥabar* of the Qur’an and Sunna (2a), *ḥabar* which was held to be true (2b), and *ḥabar*, whose particular circumstances would not have accompanied it (2c). Finally, the third type of *ḥabar* is reported by one person through direct perception (3).³⁴ It is worth noting that this *ḥabar*- discussion and classification had a theological and juristic character. Religious connotations that lay out the essence of several types of *aḥbār* and had great influence on the perception of history in the Muslim world. ‘Abd al-Ġabbār’s classification shows that in all three classes of *aḥbār* were dominated by some historical idea, that is rational investigation, required in the circumstances (*aḥwāl*) of both the report and its reporter.³⁵

Events included in the phenomena *Ma‘rakat al-Qādisiyya* are subject to the same rules and principles of the *aḥbār*-histories. In other words, historical events were authorized by *isnāds*. One of the main sources of the Battle of Al-Qādisiyya Aṭ-Ṭabarī’s *Ta’rīḥ* used this method in a perfect way. At first, authoritative reports on a given issue were presented. Then the author reported about their variants and proceeded to evaluate which ones were the most reliable. However, almost always the most important criteria of evaluation were reliability of the isnād and the reference to God and His Messenger. Aṭ-Ṭabarī avoided rational arguments and deduction by internal thinking processes.³⁶

Exploring *Ma‘rakat al-Qādisiyya* in the sources originally created in the *aḥbār*-form is particularly difficult. Firstly, they concentrated on the principles of authority and epistemology, and secondly, this kind of texts simultaneously accepted documentation and contradictory historical information. Thus some authors show the uncritically use of ‘the culture of traditionalism’ similar to Rabbinic Judaism.³⁷ Another group of critical

³³ See: ‘Abd al-Ġabbār Ibn Aḥmad, *Al-Muġnī fī abwāb at-tauḥīd wa-al-‘adl*, Al-Qāhira, Wizārat at-Ṭaqāfa wa-al-‘Iršād al-Qawmī 1965.

³⁴ See ‘Abd al-Ġabbār Ibn Aḥmad, *Al-Muġnī fī abwāb at-tawḥīd wa-al-‘adl...*, Ġuḏ’ 15, pp. 333–339.

³⁵ See Ṭarīf al-Khālīdī, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1994, pp. 144–145.

³⁶ See U. Mårtensson, *Discourse and Historical Analysis: The Case of al-Ṭabarī’s History...*, pp. 290–291; S. Leder, *The Literary Use of the Khabar: A Basic Form of Historical Writing*, in: A. Cameron, L.I. Conrad (eds.), *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East I: Problems in the Literary Source Material*, “Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam” 1, Princeton, NJ, Darwin Press 1992, pp. 277–315; Ch.F. Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, pp. 18–54, 83–102; Ṭarīf al-Khālīdī, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period...*, pp. 17–82; Aziz al-Azmeh, *Arabic Thought and Islamic Societies*, London, Croom Helm 1986, pp. 161–167; R. Stephen Humphreys, *Islamic History: A Framework for Inquiry...*, pp. 71–91; F. MacGraw Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing*, “Studies of Late Antiquity and Early Islam” 14, Princeton, NJ, Darwin Press 1998.

³⁷ See Ch.F. Robinson, *Islamic Historiography...*, pp. 85–86.

authors overcome their doubts that the *isnāds* transmit reliable historical information. They criticize the idea of “unimpeachable chains of transmission” recognizing *isnāds* as fabricated reality. The problem is that the earliest example of written *aḥbār* -stories date from the late eighth century CE, while the events they presented happened about a century earlier. This measure also reduces confidence in oral tradition because no written material existed between the *Maʿrakat al-Qādisiyya* and the *aḥbār* -stories about it. The historical reports are considered as late constructs, which represent past events according to the post-eighth century perception of their authors.³⁸ *Aḥbār* – history was written retrospectively, and works like the Aṭ-Ṭabarī’s *Taʾrīḥ* would include late opinions about *Maʿrakat al-Qādisiyya*, rather than historical facts.

The medieval *aḥbār*-historians sometimes cited different versions of the same event of *Maʿrakat al-Qādisiyya*. All that encourages speculation that there was no transmission of real facts, but only of fabricated ones. Probably the historian’s task in *aḥbār*-stories was obviously not to interpret or evaluate the Battle of Al-Qādisiyya as such. There is an impression that medieval authors usually concentrated on the question which reports about some events were acceptable, and they compiled all the quoted reports in a convenient order.³⁹ However, the *aḥbār*-histories present history in a “pluralistic” form, that is the composition of the *isnāds* of the *aḥbār*-histories characterizes a great variety of people. For example, Aṭ-Ṭabarī presents a wide range of the genealogical, regional and scholarly affiliations of transmitters (see the appendix to Aṭ-Ṭabarī’s *Taʾrīḥ*, *Dayl al-muḍayyal* ‘The Supplement to the Supplemented’⁴⁰). It allows readers to see how the particular transmitters (who represented their political and religious communities) had considered the past events in the context of developing their points of Islamic law, doctrine and administrative praxis. But it is a mistake to see *aḥbār*-histories just as a kind of collection of the transmitters. The *aḥbār*-form also conveys the personal opinions of the historian who wrote it.⁴¹ The analysis of some section of Aṭ-Ṭabarī’s *Taʾrīḥ* such as, the murder of ʿUṣmān Ibn ʿAffān (574–656),⁴² the Battle of the Camel (656)⁴³ and the *al-ḥitna at-tāniya* (680–692)⁴⁴ show that Aṭ-Ṭabarī’s perception of these events is

³⁸ See R. Stephen Humphreys, *Islamic History: A Framework for Inquiry...*, pp. 69–70; P. Crone, M. Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1977, p. 3; M. Morony, *Iraq After the Muslim Conquest*, Princeton, Princeton University Press 1984, pp. 572–575; Ch.F. Robinson, *Islamic Historiography...*, pp. 18–54; F. MacGraw Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing...*, p. 203.

³⁹ See A. Noth, L.I. Conrad, *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition. A Source-Critical Study...*, pp. 5; 9–10.

⁴⁰ See *The history of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 39: *Biographies of the Prophet’s companions and their successors*, ed. E. Landau-Tasseron, Albany, State University of New York Press 1998.

⁴¹ See U. Mårtensson, *Discourse and Historical Analysis: The Case of al-Ṭabarī’s History...*, pp. 296–297.

⁴² See M.G.S. Hodgson, *Two Pre-Modern Muslim Historians: Pitfalls and Opportunities in Presenting Them to Moderns*, in: ed. J. Nef, *Towards World Community*, “World Academy of Art and Science [Publication]” 5, The Hague, W. Junk 1968, pp. 53–68.

⁴³ J.B. Roberts, *Early Islamic Historiography: Ideology and Methodology*, PhD thesis, Ohio State University 1986.

⁴⁴ See L.E. Petersen, *ʿAlī and Muʿāwiya in early Arabic tradition studies on the genesis and growth of Islamic historical writing until the end of the ninth century*, Copenhagen, Munksgaard 1964.

closely linked with his arrangement and evaluation of reports, which are enriched with his comments.

Finally, it is interesting to note some very important observations which linked *ahbār*-histories with the *adab* culture. Many historians stress that in most cases the so-called historical sources are actually *adab* works. In fact, there is a kind of literary compilations in which “the historical events are only the skeleton for the plot.”⁴⁵ What is “the skeleton for the plot” of the Battle of Al-Qādisiyya? More research is required to answer this question comprehensively.

However, when Arabic-speaking Muslims replaced oral transmission by written communication, their precepts, roles of behavior, traditional information and teachings constituted the so-called *adab*.⁴⁶ Over time, there crystallized three main types of *adab*-books, which were situated on three closely associated planes: moral, social and intellectual. The first category, parenetic *adab*, related to ethical writings. The second, the so-called cultural *adab* contained prose or poetry fragments. The third category, training or occupational *adab*, consisted of guides intended for members of the ruling.⁴⁷

Getting back to the question about the skeleton for the plot of the *Maʿrakat al-Qādisiyya*, we should firstly consider the influence of religion and specifically the role of ‘*ulamāʾ*’ in the *adab*-tradition. These guardians, transmitters and interpreters of Islamic doctrine and Muslim law used the tradition about the Battle of Al-Qādisiyya in order to emphasize the ever presence of God’s support, securing victories to his religion. Secondly, there was a very important and famous Arab social phenomenon. Some Muslim families frequently used traditions of the *Maʿrakat al-Qādisiyya* to legitimize their respectable social positions overestimating the role of their forefathers during the heroic age of the creation of the Muslim empire.⁴⁸ Therefore, many traditions look like “promotions on the basis of loyalty.” In the frame of the culture of ‘*aṣabiyya*’ (loyalty to the group) every important clan tried to show their ancestors as the participants of the major campaigns, their bravery and valour in the fields of battle, and martyrdom in the *ḡihād*. Probably this could explain the great variety and fundamental contradictions about the Syrian campaign. In the war stories, there appeared names of many warriors who participated in several battles and who were killed in each one of them. Consequently, it is for this reason why many historians doubt certain facts of the colorful description of medieval Islamic sources, such as the heroic deeds and actions of valour or the mighty and exiting battles. The historical criticism takes with a grain of salt the information about the central control of the Caliphs and their direct supervisions of the battles or campaigns, their fervent speeches to soldiers, their clever acts of deception in the battlefields, their wise

⁴⁵ See I. Hasson, *Ansāb al-Aṣrāf d’al-Balādhurī et-il un livre de ta’rikh ou d’adab?*, “Israel Oriental Studies” 19 (1999), pp. 491–492.

⁴⁶ About the relations between oral transmission and written Muslim tradition see: Gh. Osman, *Oral vs. Written Transmission: The Case of Ṭabarī and Ibn Saʿd*, “Arabica” 48 (2001) pp. 66–80.

⁴⁷ See Ch. Pellat, *Variations sur le thème de l’adab*, in: Ch. Pellat (ed.), *Etudes sur l’histoire socio-culturelle de l’Islam: VIIe-XVe*, London, Variorum Reprints 1976, pp. 19–37.

⁴⁸ See M. Sharon, *The Decisive Battles in the Arab Conquest of Syria...*, pp. 316–317.

and brilliant dialogues between the Muslim warriors and their enemies, the miracles which happened during the battles, etc. All this spectacular information seems to belong to “the repertoire of folklore.”⁴⁹

c) Are there any certain facts about the Battle of al-Qādisiyya?

There is not enough room here for a detailed traditional description of the *Maʿrakat al-Qādisiyya*. It is sufficient to lecture on Aṭ-Ṭabarī’s *Taʾrīḥ* to have some orientation in this matter. However, a brief general draft of the progress of the Battle of Al-Qādisiyya seems to be useful because for Muslim authors this event was almost miraculous. According to them, it was a four-day incident, and a pretty cruel one, as neither side could really get an edge. The Muslim chronicles describe the first day of the *Maʿrakat al-Qādisiyya*, that is 16 November 636, as *yawm al-armāṭ*. On this day, the Muslim forces concentrated on eliminating the Persian war elephant units, which they finally did, unfortunately at great cost to the elephants (and also to the men). On the second day, the reinforcements from Syria finally arrived. The Muslim tradition shows these forces as a continuous stream of small units meant to make it look like there were more of them than there really were in order to scare and demoralize the Sasanid army. This tactic however did not immediately change the course of the battle. The third and the final day of battle (called *yawm al- aḡwāṭ* in the Muslim tradition) was the hardest for both armies. The battle continued into the night. The end of the battle was associated with the death of General (*Ērān Spāhbed*) Rostam Farroḡzād (died 636?). There are several versions of his mysterious death as well as of heroic actions of numerous Muslims warriors during the whole battle. The Muslim sources suggest the superiority of Arab archery and armor. Their arrows could apparently penetrate the Persians’ armors much more easily than vice versa. There also a description of a sandstorm blowing in the Persians’ faces on the final day. All the above mentioned details are just a small part of the abundance of the colorful information in the Muslim texts about the *Maʿrakat al-Qādisiyya*.

Since the late nineteenth century historians have tried to find the best way to deal with medieval Islamic sources. Consequently, they adopted three approaches.⁵⁰ The first group of scholars tried to evaluate the factuality of the information of the early Muslim chronicles. Identifying the veracity or factuality of the events mentioned in these texts is fundamental for reconstructing many events. The second approach stresses the necessity to

⁴⁹ See M. Sharon, *The Decisive Battles in the Arab Conquest of Syria...*, p. 351. More details about the fiction and *adab* in medieval Arabic Literature see: S. Leder, *The paradigmatic character of al-Madaʿim’s shura narration*, “*Studia Islamica*” 88 (1998), pp. 35–54; D. Beaumont, *Min Jumlat al-Jamādāt. The Inanimate in Fictional and Adab Narrative*, in: Ph.F. Kennedy (ed.), *On Fiction and Adab in Medieval Arabic Literature*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz Verlag 2005, pp. 55–68; S. Leder, *The Use of Composite Form in the Making of the Islamic Historical Tradition*, in: Ph.F. Kennedy (ed.), *On Fiction and Adab in Medieval Arabic Literature*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz Verlag 2005, pp. 125–146.

⁵⁰ See U. Mårtensson, *Discourse and Historical Analysis: The Case of al-Ṭabarī’s History...*, p. 287.

analyze how the information fits into the context of each historical work. It concentrates on the social, religious, economic and political conditions that existed in the medieval Muslim world. Finally, the third group of scholars combines both approaches. This last perspective seems to be very useful for my analysis.

Accordingly, the last approach proposes to analyze each source presenting any information about the Battle of Al-Qādisiyya in its own terms before drawing historical conclusions from it. It is also necessary to take into consideration two completely different visions of the early Islamic Conquest narrative, namely the Arab and Persian memory and identity.⁵¹ That kind of interaction caused profound causality paradoxes: the early Islamic sources about *Ma'rakat al-Qādisiyya* were not only written in order to supply information, but also to fulfill intellectual curiosity, and to supply arguments for the Arab or Persian side. This manner can be considered as part of a long tradition of debates between the adherents of contending parties among the early Muslims.⁵²

It has been noted that in the Islamic historiography, the account of the Battle of Qādisiyya occupies a prominent place (At-Ṭabari himself devoted 167 pages to this battle!⁵³). However, most of these sources are dominated by embellishments and motifs (*topoi*). These common literary devices describing the Battle of Al-Qādisiyya add or change some details of a story, usually to make it more interesting or exciting. All of these make the transparency of *Ma'rakat al-Qādisiyya* very difficult. The details given by the chronicles create confusion, e.g. about the number of the dead Muslim warriors being “resurrected” in subsequent battles. Another example is the *derafṣ* being seized twice: at Madā'in and at Nehāwand. Examples of this kind described in the Arabic sources blur the picture and highlight the role of story-tellers in the origin of the narratives and development of the *Ma'rakat al-Qādisiyya* *topoi*. Can we discover the kernel of historical truth in such documents?

The presentation of some unique elements (apparently taking place in authentic contexts) in the narratives about the Battle of Al-Qādisiyya needs to consider the fundamental methodological and conceptual framework. There is the question of a distinction between historical events and historical knowledge. Knowledge about historical events is the effect of writing history (the discourses). It is obvious that the same events are “independent” of discourse. Nevertheless, they can only be paradoxically presented in the form of discourse. In this way, historical knowledge is always discursive. That is why discourse organizes historical events along the lines of causality. Using the

⁵¹ See S. Savran, *Arabs and Iranians in the Islamic Conquest Narrative. Memory and Identity Construction in Islamic Historiography, 750–1050*, London/New York, Routledge 2018, pp. 170–230.

⁵² See M. Sharon, *The Decisive Battles in the Arab Conquest of Syria...*, p. 316.

⁵³ Many modern historians consider At-Ṭabari's *Ta'riḥ* as more “reliable” or “authoritative” than that of other medieval Islamic chronicles. The reason for this is the frequent citation of many sources by Ṭabari. However, it is an open question if he quoted those sources accurately (see M.E. Cameron, *Sayf at First: The Transmission of Sayf ibn 'Umar in al-Ṭabari and Ibn 'Asākir*, in: J.E. Lindsay (ed.), *Ibn 'Asākir and Early Islamic History*, Princeton 2001, pp. 62–77; Gh. Osman, *Oral vs. Written Transmission: The Case of Ṭabari and Ibn Sa'd...*, pp. 66–80). At-Ṭabari's biases and his choice of sources should be also studied. Ṭabari had a poor worldview, concentrated on the understanding of the background of Islam and the story of the Muslim community.

area of discourse, historians present ways in which one can and cannot comprehend the past. Thus discourses become a ‘mode of intelligibility.’⁵⁴ The above mentioned points certainly weaken the positivistic assumption that there is an objectively existing history with its precious methodology (objective laws of causality, which can be deduced and known through appropriate empirical evidence).⁵⁵

All of the above-mentioned statements complicate the critical historical evolution of the Battle of Al-Qādisiyya which is known to be one of the tremendously difficult cases. The historical sources are unclear regarding even the date of the battle, not to mention the size of the forces that participated in it! Discussion is really specific and unclear. Usually, scholars agree that the Battle of Al-Qādisiyya happened in 636 or 637. However, Parvaneh Pourshariati opted for an earlier chronology. She based her assumption on the numismatic evidence and suggests a severe blow to Sasanian administration in 634 or 635.⁵⁶

Despite historical skepticism we can possibly identify a few facts about the *Maʿrakat al-Qādisiyya* in the narrative. Some authors quite convincingly identified a few unique elements in the narrative: the local geography, the illness and absence of Saʿd and the interconnected tale of Abū Miḥḡan, the death of Rostam, and possibly the presence of elephants and the *derafš* at the battlefield.⁵⁷ The latest research seems to confirm that the Battle of Al-Qādisiyya was not conclusive; even in collective memory, the *Maʿrakat al-Qādisiyya* is considered as a complete disaster for the Sasanids. There are many indications that the Battle of Al-Qādisiyya was followed by two military operations at Ġalulāʾ and Nehāwand. The Sasanid Empire suffered from decades of external and internal warfare and financial bankruptcy.⁵⁸ In fact, the Persians built sustained resistance facing the military machine of Arabs for many years. This conquest period of 18 years, from the Muslims first attacked the Sasanid territory in 633 (the campaign of General Ḥālīd Ibn al-Walīd [584–642] in the Persian province of Asōristān) to 651, when Yazdegerd III (623–651), the last Sasanid emperor, was killed near Merw.⁵⁹

In attempting to evaluate the Muslim sources about the Battle of Al-Qādisiyya, we need to consider several issues which include the factors of his time and his world (geographically and culturally speaking). As mentioned, one of the most important factors is *topoi*. Modern historical approach is not principally based on the simplified and non-reflected use of *topoi* in the critical presentation of historical events. On the other hand, every *topos* should be carefully identified. If *topoi* are directly related to facts, they

⁵⁴ See M. de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, New York, Columbia University Press 1988, pp. 21; 58–59; U. Mårtensson, *Discourse and Historical Analysis: The Case of al-Ṭabarī’s History...*, p. 288.

⁵⁵ See U. Mårtensson, *Discourse and Historical Analysis: The Case of al-Ṭabarī’s History...*, p. 289.

⁵⁶ See P. Pourshariati, *Decline and Fall of the Sasanian Empire...*, pp. 220–222; 469.

⁵⁷ See D. Gershon Lewental, *Qādisiyyah, Then and Now: A Case Study of History and Memory...*, pp. 121–131.

⁵⁸ See D. Gershon Lewental, *Qādisiyyah, Then and Now: A Case Study of History and Memory...*, pp. 315–326.

⁵⁹ See T. Daryaee, *Yazdegerd III’s last Year. Coinage and History of Sistan at the End of Late Antiquity*, “Iranistik” 5 (2009), pp. 21–30; R. Frye, *The political history of Iran under the Sasanians*, in: Eh. Yarshater (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 3, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 116–180.

explain many phenomena of a given epoch. Scholars try to answer how particular *topoi* are created: who, when, where, and, especially, for what purpose constructs *topoi*. There are many other questions, such as how a particular *topos* was conceptualized.

Regarding the *topoi* of the Battle of Al-Qādisiyya found in the *aḥbār*-histories we can identify two main kinds of “strategies of invention.” Firstly, the *aḥbār*-histories carry some traces of a ‘salvation history’ in the sense of the God-centred and holistic perspective. The historical relation influenced by *‘ulamā’* uses the notion of an ideal saving event in the past to legitimize the social *status quo* and maintain their leaders’ authority. Moreover, the *tafsīr* and the *ta’rīḥ* share a similar moral programme of guarantee of God’s absolute Lordship. The authors of the *aḥbār*-histories usually maximize theology developing legal ethics, which became their motivation for writing works.⁶⁰ For example, Aṭ-Ṭabarī’s *Ta’rīḥ* is often considered as essentially religious and ‘remote from the modern concept of the discipline of history.’⁶¹ Of interest is, however, God’s function in the stories about the *Ma’rakat al-Qādisiyya*. Some texts related to this battle describe history by observing how those whom God blessed (caliphs, leaders) have wielded power.

Secondly, the *topoi* (features) of the *Ma’rakat al-Qādisiyya* are strongly connected with the *futūḥ* literature. The Islamic medieval sources about the Battle of Al-Qādisiyya contain four *futūḥ topoi*, which were formed and developed over time:

- stories about the heroism of concrete individuals and tribes as archetypal warriors (for example ‘Amr, the Herculean Al-Qa‘qā’ of the Tamīm tribe, the tribe of Baḡīlah),
- relations about Arab emissaries who were sent to the Persian leaders to offer them the possibility of peacefully submitting to Islam before the attack that resulted in the *Ma’rakat al-Qādisiyya* (many reports including the colorful story of Al-Muḡīra),
- signs and symbols showing the idea that the Muslim victory at the *Ma’rakat al-Qādisiyya* was divine (for example, a powerful western wind, many connections with the Quranic and biblical stories),
- accounts of the Arab conquerors as pious, innocent and naïve.⁶²

The sources give few details on the battle itself focusing rather on the heroic feats of the Muslim elite and warriors.⁶³ This is understandable in the context of the above mentioned *topoi*. Besides, some authors directly suggested their focus on the presentation of religious and political elites of the new Islamic state. For example, Aṭ-Ṭabarī himself titled his work *Muḥtaṣar ta’rīḥ al-rusul wa-mulūk* (“Abridged *ta’rīḥ* of Prophets and Kings”) or *Muḥtaṣar ta’rīḥ al-rusul wamulūk wa-l-ḥulafā’* (“Abridged *ta’rīḥ* of Prophets, Kings and Caliphs”). The purpose of this work is clear. The title indicates that the author

⁶⁰ See J. Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History*, Oxford, Oxford University Press 1978, pp. 49–50; 71–72; 87–97, 109–119; C. Gilliot, *Mythe, récit, histoire du salut dans le commentaire coranique de Ṭabarī*, “Journal Asiatique” 282 (1994), p. 246.

⁶¹ See R. Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qur’ān and Muslim Literature*, Richmond, Surrey, Curzon Press 2002, p. 129.

⁶² See D. Gershon Lewental, *Qādisiyyah, Then and Now: A Case Study of History and Memory...*, pp. 62–120.

⁶³ See D.G. Lewental, *Battle of Qādesya*, in: *Encyclopædia Iranica Online*, Viewed 18 July 2019, <<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/qadesiya-battle>>.

concentrates on prophets, kings and caliphs. He presented both the messengers sent by God to man, and world's rulers.

As a method, historical criticism is extremely useful in understanding the information about the *Ma'rakat al-Qādisiyya* in the Muslim sources. It focuses on historical evidence and is based on the context in which a work was written. However, we should be clear on this: we cannot look for contemporary standards of historical criticism in the medieval chronicles. The term *ta'rīḥ*, which nowadays is usually translated as 'history' should be understood rather in a general sense of "story about events that took place in the past."⁶⁴ In Aṭ-Ṭabarī's chronicle the term *ta'rīḥ* is related to *azmān* ("times") and *ayyām* ("days"), which allows us to recognize *ta'rīḥ* more as "dates" or "chronology" (according to Aṭ-Ṭabarī's chronicle I, 6: *naqṣudu bi-kitābinā hādā /.../ mā dakarnā min ta'rīḥ al-mulūk al-māḍīn wa-ḡumal min aḥbārihim wa-azmān al-rusul wa-al-anbiyā' wa-maqādīr a'mārihim wa-ayyām al-ḥulafā' al-sālifīn wa-ba'd siyarihim*).

Conclusion

The main, unsolved questions related to the Al-Qādisiyya narrative are the uncertainty of the date of the battle, the size of the Muslim and Persian forces that fought in the *Ma'rakat al-Qādisiyya* as well as some contradictions and different presentations of this battle. Scholars have taken many attempts to make the conflicting accounts more coherent but in fact, they reached at some speculations or, at the best, case scenario – explanations made on the basis of limited and uncertain evidence. Among the scholars were those who uncritically used Aṭ-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rīḥ* and other Muslim sources, those who represented radical skepticism to find any reliable facts there, and historians who opted for a less radical approach to the Muslim medieval texts, trying to identify some historical extract in them. Nevertheless, all of them had to face numerous contradictions and *topoi* – the whole range of factors (motifs) of the Early Islamic historiography, including the mission of prophets and rulers, the values of Islam, the vision of the Muslim society, etc. So far the scholars' efforts have produced some tangible results, but these do not affect the precise fixation of the facts about the *Ma'rakat al-Qādisiyya* according to modern research standards.

I suggest avoiding an undue emphasis on the importance of the *Ma'rakat al-Qādisiyya* and replacing this term by a more general expression "the Mesopotamian campaign 634–637" to describe this stage of the Muslim conquest of Persia. There is no point in deciding when exactly the Battle of Al-Qādisiyya (and others battles) took place. Taking into account the peculiar nature of the early Muslim sources, it seems also pointless to specify when one battle occurred and which battle was greater. Moreover, it does not appear necessary to carry out whether some battles described by the sources ever happened. At the end of the *aḥbār*-histories, the Arab campaign led to the fall of the Sasanian Empire

⁶⁴ See F. Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography*, Leiden, Brill 1968, pp. 11–16.

of Persia in 651 and the eventual decline of the Zoroastrian religion. This is definitely a true fact with all its consequences. Therefore, my proposal refers to using the term “the Mesopotamian campaign 634–637” within which many uncertain events might have taken place. This campaign, however, had specific consequences and an important meaning. Presenting the Mesopotamian campaign 634–637, it is of course necessary to show the traditional Muslim point of view, including the accounts of the Battle of Al-Qādisiyya. yet, the critical evaluation of the Muslim sources leads to a more general description of the *Maʿrakat al-Qādisiyya* as an element of the campaign (stage 634–637) which cannot be unambiguously evaluated. The “Mesopotamian campaign 634–637” seems to be more realistic and to correspond with the five steps of the Muslim conquest of Persia that are traditionally presented by many scholars writing the history of Iran (first invasion of Mesopotamia [633], second invasion of Mesopotamia [634–636], Persian Raids in Mesopotamia [638–641], Battle of Nahāwand [642] and the final Conquest of Persia [642–651]). Obviously, history contains both facts and opinions. Modern history stresses differences between facts and opinions in historical narratives. Nevertheless, specific studies of the early Islamic sources concerning the Battle of Al-Qādisiyya lead to the conclusion that it is certainly easier to interpret the functions of particular *topoi* than to determinate the facts about the *Maʿrakat al-Qādisiyya*.

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