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Framing the conquest: Bactrian local rulers and Arab muslim domination of Bactria (31-128 AH/651-746 CE)

Huseini, S.R.

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Summary

This dissertation addresses the dynamic process of the Arab Muslim conquests in Bactria and their socio-political impacts in the region. It covers almost a century from 31–128/651–746. It discusses the conquests within the context of the geographical and political complexity of the region. It highlights the local political situation before the Arab Muslims' arrival and the active role of Bactrian rulers whose cooperation and resistance shaped and reshaped the conquests. In doing so, it combines a broad spectrum of sources. It brings Bactrian, Arabic (and relevant Middle Persian and Sogdian) documents with the literary sources, specifically Arabic narratives related to the conquests and Persian and Chinese reports. It also consults numismatic data, seals and sealings, inscriptions, and archaeological reports. Based on a systematic analysis of these sources, this dissertation shows that the Arab Muslim conquests of Bactria were not simply the results of a series of 'pre-planned' military operations initiated and led by the Arab Muslims, as it is often assumed to have been the case. In contrast, the conquests were highly complicated as they were deeply affected by the local and regional political situation that were not considered. The local and regional political competitions in late Sasanian Khurasan pulled the Arab Muslims into the region, where they helped the local rulers to implement their political agendas. However, being in Sasanian Khurasan allowed the Arab Muslims to learn about local political competition, become part of it, create their niche of power, and eventually establish their political domination over the region. The conquests of Sasanian Khurasan, Bactria, Sogdiana and Khwarazm (that formed Umayyad Khurasan) became possible only with the help of some local rulers who viewed the Arab Muslims as powerful allies to overcome their internal or neighbouring rivals. The local rivalries benefited the Arab Muslims the most as they provided space for the expansion and consolidation of Arab Muslim authority in the region in the long term. At the same time, the Arab Muslim settlements in the region marked the beginning of a centuries-long process of Islamicisation in Bactria, out of which the Islamic Balkh has emerged.