

THE FIRST RESISTANCE OF THE TURKS AGAINST THE ARABS IN THE OXUS VALLEY ACCORDING TO THE NARRATION OF AT-TABARI

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Except for a few verses dating from the pre Islamic period of Arabic poetry which gave us some insight into the concepts of the nomadic Turks in Arabic Society. (1) and a number of the traditions (hadith) that were recorded in the famous authentic tradition books (2), the early political and possibly social and economic relation may have existed between Arabs and Turks during the pre and early Islamic period still remain an obscure but important subject unexplained in the pages of the general history.

What ever may have been the effective reasons which prevented the further developments of early relations between these two nations, there are many instances of records in the Islamic literature concerning the first meetings of the Arabs and Turks that took place around Marw the permanent Arabic military garrison established in the East (Kherasan) for their further invasion

- (1) Şeşen, R. Eski Arablara Göre Türkler. *Turkiyot Mec. İst.* 1969, XV, 12 See my work in the social and Economic Variations of the Arabic Conquest in Central Asia, under print
- (2) See, al-Bukhari, Muslim, and Sunan Abu Dawud. Special chapter «Bab fi qital at-Turk, to fight with the Turk» In these famous books you will find a number of Hadith mainly dealing with physical aspects of the Turkick people which may need some critical study.

of Central Asia after the small Islamic State of MADINA became a powerful empire during the reign of Caliph Omer.

Apart from many other sources particularly the great Muslim historians At-Tabari gives us full and attractive account of the first challenge made by the Turkish king KHAKAN against the muslim Arab commander Ahnaf b. Qays in the Oxus valley (around Marw 22/642) Before starting a detailed study of this particular event within the light of at-Tabari's records, it will help to understanding the subject if we have an outline of the early military activities of the Arabs in Persia.

With the death of the Holy Prophet in (632) the Islamic faith becomes the dominant religion in the southern part of Arabian peninsula. The period of the first Orthodox Caliph Abu-Bakr continued only two years and came to an end when fighting broke out with the rebellious tribal chiefs and strong attempts were made by Khalid b. al-walid to stop fratricidal wars and apostasy movements (3).

When Omer became Caliph (634-644) with the strong recommendation of the late Abu-Bakr 4. the sources of trouble was finally ended among the tribal chiefs, the strong authority of Madina was established and the social and Political peace and stability was again maintained throughout the Arabian peninsula as it was in the time of the Holy Prophet. So there was no more reason to postpone the starting of the new conquests in the neighbouring countries like Byzantium and Persia, which had been encouraged by the Holy Prophet in his life time.

As a matter of fact the muslim Arab armies advanced in several direction of the old continents of the world to the west, north and east, under the leadership of the capable commanders and won decisive victories particularly against the army of Byzantium in Syria, Egypt and also against Persians during the reign of Omer. After a decisive victory in Syria over the army of Byzan-

(3) The peninsula was now united under Abu-Bakr, by the strong sword of Khalid b. al-Walid, Hitti, P. K., History of the Arabs (10 th editions Great Britain, 1970, P. 141-142.

(4) M. al-Hudri, *Tarih al-Umam al-Islamiyyah, Misir*, I. P. 296. From et-Tabari.

(5) Remember the decisive battle of Yarmuk that paved the way for the muslim, to occupy the whole of Syria partly Egypt. See, *Ibd*, p. 152.

tium (5) the muslims marched towards Iran with the permission of the Madina council.

The Arabs with the new Islamic faith and inspiration defeated the mighty Persian army completely in the famous battle of Kadisiyah (630) and in the following year at Jalula (631) and occupied the whole of Iran including the strategic pass of Zagrous mountains in the interior of the country. The last ruler of Iran Yazdugard III. collected another huge army to meet the terrible Arabs in Niha-wend and to save his throne. The battle again ended with a glorious victory of the muslim Arabs (642) that opened the doors of Iran completely for future Arabic occupation.

The Arabs on the other hand advanced under the great commander Ahnaf b. Qays and conquered the whole northern part of Iran. For instance Rabi b. Amr says in a lyrical way that;

وبلح و نيسابور قد شفيت بنا - وطوس و مرو وقد از رنا الغنابلا
أبحنا عنها نوره بعد كوره - نفصم حتى استوينا الملاهلا
لله عيس من رأى مثلنا معا - عند أم از رنا الحيل تركا و كابلا

Balkh and Naysabur were destroyed by us. Also Tos and Marw had been raided by our amunition.

We raided it in intervals and in each raid we scattered them and at the we captured the whole strategic points.

It Was a wenderful sight to see us attacking each other and invading on horse backs Turks (*) and Kábuls (6).

Eventually they put an end the centurial old Persian state. So the border of the newly founded Islamic empire in the east extended to the Oxus river which was accepted as a «traditional boundary» (7)

(*) This may give an insight about the existance of the TURKS in the PERSIAN ARMY in the early period of history.

(6) See, alHamawî, Mujad al.Buldân, Beirût 1965, II., p. 352.

(7) Hitti, P. K., The Arabs, Chicago, 1962, p. 80.

Awhirl-wind campaing in the east carried the banner of the Prophet, across the Oxus river, the traditional bundary line between Persian speaking and Turkish speaking people.

as well as «a natural defence line» (8). between Turks and Persians since the early ages of the history. Indeed Transoxiana or Lower Turkestan was always accepted the staging area for the great nomadic Turkish invasions to words the middle East even before the Seljuqs and the Ottoman Turks.

Now the Arabs became who neighbours of the Turks were preparing themselves for a new invasion beyond the famous Oxus River in the direction of the Turkish Lands. Before giving a critical account of the Arabic invasions and conquest in Central Asia from the Turkish point of view, (9) I will try to throw light upon the means and under which circumstances the early contacts started between these two nations and these relations of course changed the currents of the whole political and social history of the world.

For this it may be necessary to mention the political correspondence which had been cocured between the Caliph Omer and his eastern commander Ahnaf b. Qays in the eve of these conquests.

According to the detailed narrations of Islamic sources particularly At-Taberî, after completing his military operations in northern Persia Ahnaf b. Qays sent a letter to Madina and gave a full information about the military conquest which he had achieved in the north-eastern part of newly founded muslim empire. In doing so he was indirectly trying to get the Madina Council's permission to attempt further expansion towards Turkestan.

Indeed Caliph Omer was very glad to get sufficient information about the military operation of muslim army in the east and their brilliant achievements. According to the great historian At-Taberî the letter of Ahnaf gave such an excitement to Omer that he started to shout unexpectedly and said :

He is Ahnaf, nic-named «THE MASTER OF THE PEOPLE OF THE EAST» (10).

But it is understood that the pleasure and enjoyment of the Caliph was not continued, so long particularly when this temporary

(8) Show, J. S., History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey, Cambridge, 1976, p. 2.

(9) See my work on The Social and Economic variations of the Arabic Conquest in central Asia, 20th anniversary publication of the Atatürks University, Erzurum, 1977, s. 210.

excitements passed and left its place the realistic judgment of the common sense. It seems that even he was deeply worried about the lightning victorious in the northern persia and the future proximity of the Turks. He did not hide his grievances and openly told his companions that;

«I would have wished that I had not sent any army to Khorasan and also wished if there should be a river of fire between us» (11).

We find in At-Tabari's narrations that after scrutinizing the situation once more he wrote a letter to his commander Ahnef and ordered him to stop his advance to further east in the direction of Turkestan and said;

«أما بعد فلا تحوزن النهر واقتصر على ما دعه وقد عرفتم
 باي شيء دخلتم على خراسان فداوموا على الذي بدمكم النصر
 واياكم ان تعبروا فتنفضوا ..»

«Oh' dont cross the river (oxus) and keep yourself withing it. You know the means by which you had entered Khorasan, so keep to using the same means. If you do that victory will remain with you. I repeat don't cross the Oxus river otherwise you scattered» (12).



(10) هو الا حنف وهو سيد اهل المشرق المسمى بغير

at-Tabari Huseyniyah
 Printing Hose, Egypt, IV. p. 264

(11) Al-Tabari, V. p. 264.

«لو دونه نبي لم اكن بعثت
 الي خراسان جندا ولو دنت انه لو كان بيننا وسبها حره
 من نار ..»

we have seen the same deliberate nature of Omar when the muslim army was advanced towards Egypt under Umar b. al-As, and north Africa.

(12) At-Tabari, IV. p. 264.

Now we will try to study the other interesting side of this narration which is recorded by at-Tabari. There is no doubt that the above mentioned letter of Omar reminding us, the attitudes of Holy Prophet against the Turks if we take in to considerations of his sayings in the authentic Hadith collections.

Most probably Caliph Omar wrote such an interesting letter following the principle foreign policy founded by the Holy Prophet during his life time as conduct to be followed towards the Turks which was principally based on the «non violation» and «non provocation» of the Turks. (13) Aside from a number of his traditions, in one of them the Prophet of Islam as it is recorded by Sunan of Abu-Dawud (one of the six authentic hadith collection) said that;

« قال النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم :

« رعو الحثثة ما رعوكم واتركوا الترك ما تركواكم ، ، » .

«Leave the Atheopians as long as the leave you, and abandon the Turks as long as they have abandoned you» (14).

Not only the Caliph Omar but many great Muslim leaders and commanders including some of the Umayyad Caliphs like Muaveyah the founder of Umayyad dynasty and Omar b. Abdul Aziz followed the same policy against the Turks and treated them with caution according to instruction of the Holy, Prophet, instead of provoking and guarding them into battle fields.

It may not be necessary to discuss the matter in greater detail due to the limitation of our main subject, but we can find very attractive comments and some important narrations which are

recorded by Al-Jahiz in his celebrated book called *الانتراك* : : *مضائل*

(13) See. KITAPCI, Zakaria, at-Turk fi Muallefât al-Jahiz, Beirut, 1972, p. 47-48.

(14) See Sunan, Abu Dawud, special chapter, «an-Nahy fi qital at-Turk» The same hadith narrated by many authors with a different variations For example al-Jahiz, fazail al-Atrak, (Rasail al-Jahiz) editl by Abdussalam M. Harun, Cairo, 1963, I, p. 58, 76. al-Hamawi, Mujam, II, p. 23, He recorded the same hadith with four different forms. Ibn al-Fakih, K. al-Buldan, Laiden, 1302, p. 316.

The Superior Quality of the Turks.» Indicating the implementation of this policy by the prominent Arab leaders in their early struggle against the Turks. Moreover later Arabic developments and relations inevitably diverted from this original concept particularly while they were conquering Central Asia during the Umayyad period. Qutayba b. Muslim. Yazid b. Muhallab and many other Umayyad governors in Khorasan did not discriminate the Turks from any other nations (15).

As Al-Jahiz tells us for instance during his struggle with the Turks Yazid b. Qatada once recalled the Arab soldiers what Omar had warned that «the Turks were a fierce enemy» and he prevented the Arabs from attacking the Turks (16). In another narration Al-Jahiz stating, that, while Hamza b. Adrak was governor in a place in Khurasan a Turkish cavalry troop attacked them unexpectedly. Hamza b. Adrak being stronger than these Turks prohibited his soldiers from fighting against them and said that;

«Dont start fighting if They are not intending to fight you, because it has said in the tradition that «leave them alone as long as they leave you alone» (17).

We will see towards the end of this article that Ahnaf b. Qays «The master of the East» the conquerer of northern Iran, and the brilliant commander of Caliph Omer followed the same *non violation «and non provocation»* policy towards the Turks when the Turkish King KHAKAN suddenly appeared at Marw.

(15) KITAPCI, Zakaria, Ibid, p. 61-73. Forexample, when Yazid b. Muhallab the Governor of Khurasan after Qutayba b. Muslim conquered JURJAN, according the narration of at-Tabari he kelled 40,000

Turks after Plundering city. ،، قتلهم يزيد اربعمون الفا ،،

ان الدين at-Tabari, VII, p 129.

(16) al-Jahiz, Ibd, I, p. 58.

(17) al-Jahiz, Ibd, I, p. 58.

” و ذكر قول عمر ابن الخطاب

في الترك حيث قال : ”عد و شديد ،، فنهى العرب عن التعرض للترك

” افرجوا لهم ما تركواكم

ولا تتعرضوا لهم فانه قد قيل : ” تاركواهم ما تركواكم ،،

It is very interesting to note that, Al-Jahiz a great Arabic literary scholar, and admirer of the Turkish prowess as soldiers had been attacked by the fanatical Arab leaders during time of Al-Mustasim (822 - 842) the founder of permanent Turkish royal army in Baghdad later in Samarra, while he was defending the superiority of the Turkish military spirit in a comparative way with other groups who belong to a different nations in the Caliphate army (x) he argued with them and recalled the same tradition and said that :

«The Tradition of Holy Prophet, is an advice to all the Arabs. The right decision for us to live with them in a peaceful way and abolish the fighting. What are you thinking about a nation that even Alexander the Great (Dh'l-Qarnayn) after defeating the whole world mercilessly in a fierce way, (met the Turks) and not attached them and said «leave them alone» and calling them «TURK» (18).



Let us return back and continue to analyse the narration of At-Tabari relating to the important letter of Omar to his commander Ahnaf.

Moreover some important events occurred later on which clearly demonstrates how was Caliph Omar is great and was a far sighted man in the affairs of state when he wrote this urgent letter to Ahnaf and prevented him from launching his new invasion into Turkish lands.

(*) For further information about the Turks in the Caliphate Army see, Kitapçı, Z. at-Turk. p. 96-132. Also my article «The in the Muslim Countries, Prof. Tayyib Okic Armağan, Ankara, 1977, p. 195

(18) al-Jahiz Ibid, p. 58. This is the text of his impressive speech.

وهذه (أي الحديث) وصيه لجميع العرب. فان الرأي متاركنا
وسالمتنا وما ظنكم بقوم لم يعرض لهم في القرنين وبقوله
اتركواهم سموا الترك، هذا بعد ان غلب على جميع الارض
غلبه وفسرا وعوده وقهرا ،،

In fact it may be recalled that following his final defeat at Nihavent which destroyed completely the might of Persia and drained her wealth and financial resources, Yazdugard III, wrote letters to neighbouring rulers including the Turkish king KHAKAN and the local ruler of SOGDIA and the king of CHI-NA (19) seeking help against the new danger arising from the heartland of the Arabian desert. Furthermore if we accept his writings as a true record of the facts At-Tabarî relates that Yazdugard fled his country following this Arabian victory and took refuge with Khakan in the lower Turkestan. (20).

Whatever may be the case after destroying the centuries old state of Persia, the Arabs began to pose a strong menace to the Turks and starts to threat the local Turkish ruler in Bukhara and Samarkand. So it was necessary to respond to Yazdugard III. and help him for repulsing the Arabs back to their homelands. For this purpose Khakan gathered a large army from Farghana (*) the main Turkish center in central Asia, and from the local people of Lower Turkestan (ahl-as-Sogd), (21) he then entered Persia via Oxus valley and marched together with Yazdugard towards Balkh the newly established Arabic military garrison in Iran.

The news of Khakan's advance towards Iran horrified the Arabs and created panic among the Kufian soldiers stationed in Balkh. They evacuated the city rapidly and Joined the main Arab army

(19) al-Tabarî, IV. p. 262.

(20) al-Tabarî, IV, p. 263.

فهر بيزد جرد الى خاقان ملك الترك بما وراء النهر ،،

(*) For further information about the Turks in the Caliphate army see, Kitapçı, Zakaria, al-Turk, p. 96-132. Also my article «The Turks in the Muslim countries, Prof. Tayyib Okic Armagani, Ankara, 1977, 5, 195.

(21) al-Tabarî- IV, p. 263.

و جمع حواره من أهل عرقانة والصدف ثم خرج بهم و خرج معه
يرد جرد واجتار المهره ،،

(*) It is interesting to note that al-Mutasim (the origin of his mother was a Turk) also collected his royal Turkish soldiers mostly from FARGHANA.

at their permanent military base at Marw. Observing their panic and retreat from Balkh, Khakan continued his advance towards Marw. Meanwhile many local Persians joined the Khakan's army from Balkh and the other neighbouring cities (22). The number of his soldiers were not mentioned by our historian at-Tabari, but there is no doubt that if we compare the Arabs he was having a huge army when he appeared suddenly at Marw.

Bell's danger again started to ring for the Arabs, because the war became inevitable between the heroic people of Central Asia and the Arabs. But if the Arabs who already have been deported from their homelands and deprived already from the local people support, were defeated by the Turks would have evacuate the whole of Persia. If their resistance was broken by the the united Turco-Iranian forces it would be impossible to stop the Arabs from retreating to Arabia and this would absolutely lead to the collapse and disintegration of the eastern part of the muslim empire.

In this rapidly deteriorating situation, it became clear that whatever decision and actions taken by the Ahnaf would have a great bearing on the future destiny of Arabs. Possibly for the first time in their history of conflict, the Turks and Persians now came together and united their arms against the new enemy the Arabs, whether they will expel the Arabs from Iran to the Arabian deserts or Turkish king KHAKAN will change his mind with a sudden decision and leave Yazducard III, alone in the battle field with his destiny and take his army back to inner side of Turkestan. Turkish king Khakan would choose the second option. He would leave siege and disappers from Marw very soon.

On the other hand, Ahnaf b. Qays commander of the muslim Arabs acted prudently to overcome the present Turkish menace. He was going to implement a kind of defence strategy against the enemy. He replaced his soldiers to get the maximum benefit from the geographical conditions. In a way that the mountain will protect their rear, while the river which was in front of them would provide them a kind of security or natural defence line to stop a possible attack that may come from the Turks.

In the same morning he collected his soldiers and delivered a short but effective speech just to give them a moral reinforcement

(22) at-Tabari, IV, p. 264.

and to excite their religious sentiments as it was done by many great commanders before joining in war in History According to our source at-Tabarî he said that :

«You are small in number and your enemy is great» This fact must not worry you, because *«it had happened so many times that a small army defeated a large one by the help of Allah and Allah is with those who steadfastly preserve»* (23). Now you go from this place to the mountain leaving it to cover your backs and let the river be between you and your enemy so as you can fight them while they are facing you» (24).

Meanwhile he started to use his propaganda machines effectively to the effect that he does not want a war with the Turks unless if it became inevitable, pointing out that Caliph Omer had instructed them not to cross Oxus river toward the Turkish lands. At the beginning Khakan the great commander did not believe it was not but a rumour or a kind of trick created by the Arabs to deceive or to pacify the determinations of his soldiers. But when after several days the Arabs made no move to attack in spite of several challenges made by the Turks, the Turkish king intended to give credence to this propaganda. However for Ahnaf, this difficult and uncertain situation would not continue for long.

While Ahnaf pondering over the so many problems and questions in the battle field fortune once more smiled on him, at this time more than he ever expected. From inside Turkestan came the news of important developments involving Chinese provocations and disturbances among the local tribal chiefs against the Khakan and his administration. experiences have taught the Turks that the Chinese were more dangerous than the present Arabs.

Consequently the Turkish king held an emergency meeting with his top military officers. After a realistic appraisal of the situation, he said that:

(23) Quoted from the Holy Quran, s. II. 250.

« كم من فئة قليلة غلبت فئة كثيرة باذن الله والله المصبرين »

(24) at-Tabarî IV. p. 264.

«Our stay has prolonged and those people (the Arabs) have occupied a strategic position which no other army has occupied before. So I believe that no benefit will come out of fighting them and therefore we have to leave» (25).

He decided to leave the battle-field with out annon cing on a suitable night, and go back to Turkestan to repel the Chinese attack. Much to the surprise of the Arabs, that they woke up one morning and find the whole battle field deserted. Khakan had departed from Marws to the direction of Balkh. When the news of this withdrawal reach Ahnaf, his junior commanders were for persuing the Khakan to crush his army once and for all in a quick action. However Ahnaf has a different view, he wisely said;

«You stay in your proper place, let them go» (26).

The date of this historical event as recorded by at-Tabari which may be accepted as the turning point of the Turkish history is 22 A.H./622.

Indeed the heroic nation of Cantral Asia the Turks and the brave sons of Arabian desert the Arabs met and challange each other for the first time in their long history around the valley of Oxus river. This was the beginning of the political social and religious interaction between the Turks and the Arabs which has changed the currents of the whole history of the old world.

(25) at-Tabari, IV, 265.

« وقد طال مقامنا وقد أصيب هؤلاء القوم بمكان لم يصب
بمثله قط . وما لنا في قتال هؤلاء القوم من خير فانصرفوا
بنا... »

(26) at-Tabari, IV, p. 265.

« قال المسلمون للاحنف ما ترى في ابتاعهم؟ فقال أقيموا
مكانكم وادعواهم... »

«TABERÎ'YE GÖRE CEYHUN NEHRİ HAVZASINDA İLK TÜRK ARAB KARŞILAŞMASI»

(Türkçe Özet)

Assot. Prof. Zekeria KİTAPCI

Cahiliye devrine aid bir kaç şiir ve bazı hadisler müstesnâ, İslâmiyetten önceki Türk-Arap münasebetlerinin siyasî ve sosyal yönü genel tarihin karanlık sayfaları arasındadır. Fakat büyük tarihçi TABERÎ'nin Ceyhun havzasında tarihî ilk Türk-Arap karşılaşması hakkında oldukça geniş ve ilgi çekici rivayetleri vardır.

Hız. Ömer'in hilâfeti zamanında genişleyen fetih hareketleri sayesinde doğuda asırlık Sâsânî devletini yıkan Araplar, İranlılarla Türkler arasında ilk çağlardan beri tabii bir sınır olarak kabul edilen Ceyhûn Nehrine kadar dayanmışlardı. Doğuda parlak zaferler kazanan Ahnef b. Qays durumu Hız. Ömer'e bildirmiş bununla bir nevi doğu harekâtına devam etmek istemiştir. Fakat basiretli bir devlet adamı olan Hız. Ömer «keşke aramızda ateşten bir deniz olsaydı» diyerek Ahnef'in ileri harekâtına katiyyen müsâde etmemiştir.

Hız. Ömer'in bu teenni ile hareket etmesinin sebebi Hız. Peygamber'in Türk-Arap siyasi münasebetlerinin esasını ortaya koyan bir kısım hadisleri açısından araştırmamızda değerlendirilmiştir.

Diğer taraftan taç ve tahtını kaybeden YEDÜCERD, Türk Hakanına sığınmış, Türk Hakanını tahrik ederek Ceyhun havzasından İrana girmesini ve Araplara karşı vaziyet almasını sağlamıştır. Büyük bir ordu ile Belh'e gelen Türk Hakanı Arapların

burasını boşalttığını ve Merv'e çekildiklerini görmüştür. Hakan ilerlemesine devam etmiş, beraberinde Yezdücerd de olduğu halde Arapların asıl askeri karargâhı olan Merv'e gelerek Ahnef'in ordusunu kuşatmıştır.

Ahnef gerçekte çok zor günler yaşamıştır. Zira gerek insan gücü gerekse sosyal çevre Arapların tamamen aleyhinde idi. Bir çözüme olduğu takdirde Arapların bütün İrani boşaltmaları gerekecektir. Bu ise İslâm imparatorluğunun doğuda çökmesi idi. Çok ince bir politika ve kaderin beklenmedik yardımı ile Ahnef bu büyük Türk tehlikesini kolaylıkla bertaraf etmesini başarmış aynı zamanda daha sonraki Arap fetihlerinede çok sağlama bir zemin hazırlamıştır.

Bütün bu olaylar Taberînin çok kıymetli rivayetlerinin ışığı altında araştırmamızda değerlendirilmek istenmiştir.

Z. K.