

= Third Perso @-@ Turkic War =

The Third Perso @-@ Turkic War was the third and final conflict between the Sassanian Empire and the Western Turkic Khaganate . Unlike the previous two wars , it was not fought in Central Asia , but in Transcaucasia . Hostilities were initiated in 627 AD by Khagan Tong Yabghu of the Western Göktürks and Emperor Heraclius of the Eastern Roman Empire . Opposing them were the Sassanid Persians , allied with the Pannonian Avars . The war was fought against the background of the last Byzantine @-@ Sassanid War and served as a prelude to the dramatic events that changed the balance of powers in the Middle East for centuries to come (Battle of Nineveh , Islamic conquest of Persia) .

= = Background = =

Following the First Siege of Constantinople by the Avars and Persians , the beleaguered Byzantine Emperor Heraclius found himself politically isolated . He could not rely on the Christian Armenian potentates of Transcaucasia , since they were branded as heretics by the Orthodox Church , and even the king of Iberia preferred to befriend the religiously tolerant Persians . Against this dismal background , he found a natural ally in Tong Yabghu . Earlier in 568 , the Turks under Istämi had turned to Byzantium when their relations with Persia soured over commerce issues .

In 625 , Heraclius dispatched to the steppes his emissary , named Andrew , who promised to the Khagan some " staggering riches " in return for military aid . The khagan , on his part , was anxious to secure the Chinese @-@ Byzantine trade along the Silk Route , which had been disrupted by the Persians in the aftermath of the Second Perso @-@ Turkic War . He sent word to the Emperor that " I shall take revenge on your enemies and will come with my valiant troops to your help " . A unit of 1 @, @ 000 horsemen fought their way through Persian Transcaucasia and delivered the Khagan 's message to the Byzantine camp in Anatolia .

= = Siege of Derbent = =

Early in 627 , the Göktürks and their Khazar allies approached the Caspian Gates at Derbent . This newly built stronghold was the only gate to the fertile land of Aghvania (modern @-@ day Azerbaijan) . Lev Gumilev observes that the lightly armed militia of Aghvania was no match against the hordes of heavy cavalry led by Tong Yabghu . His troops stormed Derbent and swarmed over Aghvania , plundering it thoroughly . The fall and sack of Derbent was described in detail by the Armenian historian Movses Kagankatvatsi , thought to have been an eyewitness to the event :

The fall of the fortress that had been considered impregnable sparked panic all over the country . Aghvanian forces withdrew to their capital , Partav , from whence they made for the Caucasus Mountains . The Göktürks and Khazars overtook them near the village of Kalankatuyk , where they were either slain or taken prisoner . The conquerors imposed upon Aghvania a heavy system of taxation , as reported by Movses :

= = Siege of Tbilisi = =

The next objective of the Turkic @-@ Byzantine offensive was the Kingdom of Iberia , whose ruler Stephanus was a tributary to Khosrau II of Persia . In the words of Movses Kagankatvatsi , the Khazars " encircled and besieged the famous and great sybaritic trade city of Tbilisi , " whereupon they were joined by Emperor Heraclius with his mighty army .

Heraclius and Tong Yabghu (called Ziebel in the Byzantine sources) met under the walls of Narikala . The yabgu rode up to the emperor , kissed his shoulder and made a bow . In return , Heraclius hugged the barbarian ruler , called him his son , and crowned him with his own diadem . During the ensuing feast the Khazar leaders received ample gifts in the shape of earrings and clothes , while the yabghu was promised the hand of the emperor 's daughter , Eudoxia Epiphania .

The siege dragged on without much progress , punctuated by frequent sallies on the part of the

besieged ; one of these claimed the life of their king . After two months the Khazars retreated to the steppe , promising to return by the autumn . Tong Yabghu left young Böri Shad , either his son or nephew , in charge of the remaining forty thousand which were to assist Heraclius during the siege . Before long these departed as well , leaving the Byzantines to continue the siege alone and prompting jeers from the besieged .

When the Georgians ironically referred to the Emperor as " the goat , " hinting at his incestuous marriage , Heraclius recalled a passage from the Book of Daniel about the two @-@ horned ram overthrown by the one @-@ horned goat . He interpreted this as a good sign and struck southward against Persia . On 12 December 627 he appeared on the bank of the Tigris and clashed with Persian forces near the ruins of Nineveh . In January he ravaged the environs of the Persian capital Ctesiphon , signalling a sea @-@ change in the Persian @-@ Byzantine relations .

= = Conclusion = =

After the triumph of Heraclius , Tong Yabghu hastened to resume the siege of Tiflis and successfully stormed the city in winter . " With their swords raised , they advanced on the walls , and all this multitude , climbing upon each other 's shoulders , rose up the walls . A black shadow fell upon the woe-begone citizens ; they were vanquished and lost their ground , " Movses narrates . Although the Georgians surrendered without further resistance , the city was looted and its citizens were massacred . The Persian governor and the Georgian prince were tortured to death in the presence of Tong Yabghu .

The Gokturks , renowned for their expertise in hand @-@ to @-@ hand combat , never excelled in siegecraft . For this reason Gumilev attributes the taking of Tiflis to the Khazars . There are good reasons for believing that this success encouraged Tong Yabghu to grander designs . This time he planned to incorporate Aghvania into his khaganate , rather than to wield a usual campaign of plunder . Before returning to Suyab he instructed Böri Shad and his generals to " spare the lives of the rulers and nobles of that land , in as much as they come out to meet my son , surrender to my rule , concede their towns , castles , and trade to my troops " .

These words indicate that Tong Yabghu was eager to retain control of the westernmost portion of the Silk Route , as he tightened his grip of its other segments all the way east to China . In April 630 Böri Shad determined to expand his control of Transcaucasia and sent his general Chorpan Tarkhan with as little as 30 @,@ 000 cavalry to invade Armenia . Using a characteristic ploy of nomadic warriors , Chorpan Tarkhan ambushed and annihilated a Persian force of 10 @,@ 000 dispatched by Shahrbaraz to counter the invasion . Turks knew the Sassanid response would be harsh , they plundered cities and withdrew their forces back to the steppes .