

= Nasr ibn Sayyar =

Nasr ibn Sayyar al-Asadi al-Laythi al-Kinani (Arabic : ناسر بن سيار الأسدي الليثي الكناني) (663 ? 748) was an Arab general and the last Umayyad governor of Khurasan in 738 ? 748 . Nasr played a distinguished role in the wars against the Turgesh , although he failed to decisively confront the rebellion of al-Asad Harith ibn Surayj in its early stages . Although respected as a soldier and a statesman , he owed his appointment as governor more to his obscure tribal background , which rendered him dependent on the Caliph . His tenure was nevertheless successful , as Nasr introduced long overdue tax reforms that alleviated social tension and largely restored stabilized Umayyad control in Transoxiana , which had been greatly reduced under the Turgesh onslaught . His last years were occupied by intertribal rivalries and uprisings , however , as the Caliphate itself descended into a period of civil war . In 746 Nasr was driven from his capital by Ibn Surayj and Juday ' al-Kirmani , but returned after the latter fell out among themselves , resulting in Ibn Surayj 's death . Preoccupied with this conflict , Nasr was unable to stop the outbreak and spread of the Abbasid Revolution , whose leader , Abu Muslim , exploited the situation to his advantage . Evicted from his province in early 748 , he fled to Iran pursued by the Abbasid forces , where he died in December 748 .

= = Early life and career = =

Nasr was a military leader with long service and experience in Khurasan . As early as 705 he participated in a campaign along the upper Oxus River , led by Salih , the brother of Qutayba ibn Muslim , the general who had been tasked with subduing Transoxiana . For his service during this campaign , Nasr was awarded an entire village in this region . Despite the successes of Qutayba , much of Central Asia east of the Oxus remained outside effective Arab control ; while garrisons had been established in places like Samarkand , Balkh , or Bukhara , the Caliphate largely relied on client relationships with the multitude of local rulers , who became tributary to the Umayyads . In addition , clashes with the Chinese backed Turgesh , the ambiguous policy followed regarding conversion of the native population (mass conversions would lessen the taxable population and hence the amount of tribute received) and increasing inter-Arab tribal factionalism weakened Umayyad control over the region and necessitated increased military activity .

In 724 , Nasr is recorded as heading a Mudari army sent against Balkh , where restive Yemenite troops refused to participate in the expedition against Ferghana that resulted in the disastrous " Day of Thirst " . His troops , reinforced by men from the subject Hephthalite principality of Chaghaniyan , clashed with the Yemenis at Baruqan and prevailed over them . This led to resentment towards his person among the Yemenis , especially from those around Balkh ; and during the governorship of the Yemeni Asad ibn Abdallah al-Qasri , along with other Mudari leaders , Nasr fell into disfavour and was mistreated .

Nasr was one of the few Muslim leaders to distinguish himself in the disastrous Battle of the Defile in July 731 . In 734 he was appointed as governor of Balkh , after arresting the previous governor . There he faced the rebellion of the local Khurasani troops under al-Asad Harith ibn Surayj , who called for reforms in taxation and the ending of discrimination towards the native converts (mawali) . Ibn Surayj marched on Balkh and took the city with only 4 ,000 followers , even though Nasr commanded 10 ,000 men . It is unclear from the sources whether the town was seized from Nasr , or whether it was captured in his absence and then successfully held against him . In any case , Nasr and his army remained passive for the remainder of the revolt ; they did not aid the provincial capital , Merv , when the rebels attacked it , and this stance encouraged several local tribes to join the uprising . Eventually however the rebels were defeated by Juday ' al-Kirmani , with Ibn Surayj fleeing across the Oxus to the Turgesh .

= = Appointment as governor of Khurasan = =

In July 738 , at the age of 74 , Nasr was appointed as governor of Khurasan . Despite his age , he

was widely respected both for his military record , his knowledge of the affairs of Khurasan and his abilities as a statesman . Julius Wellhausen wrote of him that " His age did not affect the freshness of his mind , as is testified not only by his deeds , but also by the verses in which he gave expression to his feelings till the very end of his life " . However , in the climate of the times , his nomination owed more to his appropriate tribal affiliation than his personal qualities .

From the early days of the Muslim conquests , Arab armies were divided into regiments drawn from individual tribes or tribal confederations (butun or ? asha ? ir) . Despite the fact that many of these groupings were recent creations , created for reasons of military efficiency rather than any common ancestry , they soon developed a strong and distinct identity . Eventually , and certainly by the beginning of the Umayyad period , this system progressed to the formation of ever @-@ larger super @-@ groupings , culminating in the two super @-@ groups : the northern Arab Mudaris or Qaysis , and the south Arabs or " Yemenis " (Yaman) , dominated by the Azd and Rabi 'ah tribes . By the 8th century , this division had become firmly established across the Caliphate and was a source of constant internal instability , as the two groups formed in essence two rival political parties , jockeying for power and separated by a fierce hatred for each other . During Hisham ibn Abd al @-@ Malik 's reign , the Umayyad government appointed Mudaris as governors in Khurasan , except for Asad ibn Abdallah al @-@ Qasri 's tenure in 735 ? 738 . Nasr 's appointment came four months after Asad 's death . In the interim , the sources report variously that the province was run either by the Syrian general Ja 'far ibn Hanzala al @-@ Bahrani or by Asad 's lieutenant Juday ' al @-@ Kirmani . At any rate , the sources agree that al @-@ Kirmani stood at the time as the most prominent man in Khurasan and should have been the clear choice for governor . His Yemeni roots (he was the leader of the Azd in Khurasan) , however , made him unpalatable to the Caliph .

Nasr on the other hand , in addition to his other qualities , was a Mudari and married to a Tamimi wife . He would therefore be acceptable to the numerous Mudari element of the Khurasani army , which outnumbered the Yemenis , but could also , as a local , help to reduce the Khurasani Arabs ' discontent towards the Syria @-@ centric Umayyad government . Nasr 's own relatively obscure tribal background ? from a non @-@ noble family of the Layth tribe from Kinanah ? also suited the Caliph 's purposes , as it meant that he lacked any local power base of his own . Indeed , Nasr 's rule throughout his tenure was not fully accepted by many Arab tribesmen : aside from the Yemenis , who favoured their " own " candidate al @-@ Kirmani and resented the shift in power back towards the Mudaris , the Qays around Nishapur refused to support him , and even the Syrian contingent sided with his opponents . Nasr was hence mostly reliant on the support of his wife 's powerful Tamim tribe living around Marv . As long as he was supported by a strong central government in Damascus , Nasr was able to keep his internal enemies in check , but in the troubles that followed Hisham 's death in 743 , that support vanished . In the event , Nasr would succeed in retaining his office for a decade , despite the turmoil that swept the Caliphate after 743 . When Yazid III came to power in early 744 , he initially ordered Nasr replaced . Nasr refused to accept this , and held on to the post , being eventually confirmed to it a few months later . After Marwan II 's rise to power in December 744 , he likewise affirmed Nasr 's position .

= = Reforms and campaigns = =

Nasr gave his province an unprecedented period of good government , stability and prosperity , so that , in the words of the 9th @-@ century historian al @-@ Mada 'ini , " Khurasan was built up as it had never been before " . His major achievements during his tenure were the reform of the tax system and the restoration of Umayyad control over Transoxiana .

The Khurasani tax system had been established at the time of the Muslim conquest and remained unchanged since . It relied on the collection of a fixed tribute by the local non @-@ Muslim (mostly Zoroastrian) gentry , the dihqans , who often discriminated against the Muslim settlers and the native converts . This contributed to the latter 's increasing resentment of Umayyad rule , and the demand for a tax reform had fuelled past revolts like that of Ibn Surayj . Consequently , Nasr streamlined the tax system in 739 , implementing a blanket imposition (the kharaj) on all owners of agricultural land and forcing the non @-@ Muslims to pay an additional poll tax (the jizyah) . In this

way , the chroniclers report , 30 @,@ 000 Muslims were absolved of the jizyah , and 80 @,@ 000 non @-@ Muslims were forced to pay it instead . Attention was also paid to the accurate collection of the kharaj in accordance with treaties with the local rulers , as a result of which the tax burden was generally eased . This reform is traditionally held to have assisted in regaining the loyalty of the local populations and their princes , who returned quickly to the Arab fold ; other modern scholars however consider the effect of this belated reform on the prevailing anti @-@ Umayyad climate as minimal . Upon his appointment , Nasr also moved the provincial capital back to Merv from Balkh , where Asad had established it . Additionally , for the first time in the province 's history he appointed sub @-@ governors . They were drawn from among his allies and supporters in order to reward them and to improve his own control of the province .

Taking advantage of the disintegration of the Turgesh khaganate after the murder of the khagan Suluk , Nasr moved aggressively across the Oxus . His first campaign , immediately after his appointment , was in the area of Chaghaniyan ; his second campaign , in 740 , recovered much territory in Sogdia , including Samarkand , with little apparent resistance . Aiming to recover all the lands previously conquered under Qutayba ibn Muslim and to curtail the activities of the renegade Ibn Surayj , who was based there , Nasr then launched an expedition targeting al @-@ Shash (Tashkent) . The principality of Usrushana submitted peacefully , but when the Muslim army reached the Jaxartes , it was confronted by a 15 @,@ 000 @-@ strong force from Shash along with Ibn Surayj 's men and some Turgesh ; according to Muslim tradition , the latter were led by Suluk 's murderer and successor , Kursul . According to Arab tradition , Nasr was able to drive off the Turgesh and scored a victory against one of their detachments , killing its chief , but apparently failed to subdue al @-@ Shash , for he was forced to content himself with an agreement with the ruler of Shash , whereby Ibn Surayj was evicted to Farab , where the latter was left unmolested to continue his opposition to the Umayyads . Nasr also launched two expeditions against Ferghana , which plundered and ravaged the countryside and took many captives . It seems , however , that the Muslim reconquest at this time did not extend much further than Samarkand , with occasional tribute being possibly levied from the remoter principalities .

Outwardly at least , by 743 the Umayyad position in Khurasan appeared stronger than ever . The reality beneath the splendid façade however was different . Tension and mutual mistrust existed between the Khurasani Arab levies (muqatila) and the 20 @,@ 000 Syrian troops introduced into the province as a security measure after the disastrous Battle of the Defile in 731 , while tribal antagonism continued to create trouble : apart from continued Yemeni resentment at Nasr , there was strong dislike of the Umayyads ' Syrian regime , fanned by their unjust tax policies . Although Nasr tried to remedy the situation , it was too late .

In addition , Khurasan was a major center of early Shiism , and specifically of the Kaysanite sect of the Hashimiyya , which had gained wide acceptance in the province , especially among the mawali . In 742 ? 743 , Nasr confronted and defeated a revolt led by Yahya , son of Zayd ibn Ali and the leader of the Hashimiyya in Khurasan . Yahya was captured and executed , and the resulting vacuum in Hashimi leadership opened the path for the Khurasani branch of the movement to come under the control of the Abbasid family . It is however , a testament to the " respect and even affection " (Gibb) with which Nasr was regarded by the native population in Transoxiana , that in contrast to Khurasan no native city there welcomed the Hashimi missionaries , and that they remained loyal to him even during the later Abbasid Revolution .

= = Civil wars and the Abbasid Revolution = =

In 743 , after the death of Caliph Hisham , Walid II reconfirmed Nasr in his post , but the influential governor of Iraq , Yusuf ibn Umar , an opponent of Nasr , tried to lure him away from his province by calling him to Iraq . Nasr delayed his departure , stalling for time , and was saved by the murder of Walid in April 744 . However , Walid 's successor , Yazid III , moved to install a regime dominated by the Yemeni Kalbi tribe . Nasr 's position was severely undermined , and the Yemeni faction now hoped to see their leader Juday ' al @-@ Kirmani appointed governor in his stead . Indeed , Yazid appointed his favourite , the Kalbi Mansur ibn Jumhur , as governor of Iraq , and he in turn

nominated his own brother as Nasr 's replacement . Nasr refused to accept this , and was again fortunate in his persistence , for Mansur fell out of favour and was dismissed after only two months . Agitation among the Yemeni faction persisted , amidst rumours that Nasr had intercepted letters appointing al @-@ Kirmani as governor , and a dispute on the payment of stipends to the muqatila . Nasr tried to secure his own position by deposing al @-@ Kirmani from his leadership of the Azd , as well as by trying to win over Azd and Rabi 'ah leaders . This led to a general uprising by the Azd and Rabi 'ah under al @-@ Kirmani . It is indicative of the lingering intertribal antagonism of the late Umayyad world that the rebellion was launched in the name of revenge for the Muhallabids , an Azd family that had been purged after rebelling in 720 , an act which had since become a symbol of Yemeni resentment of the Umayyads and their northern Arab @-@ dominated regime .

On 13 July 744 , Nasr captured and imprisoned al @-@ Kirmani . After barely a month , the latter escaped , and his rebellion was joined not only by Azd soldiers , but also by many of the Arab settlers around Marv . A tentative truce was initially agreed upon , during which fruitless negotiations were conducted , but after Yazid reconfirmed Nasr in his post , al @-@ Kirmani and the Yemenis ? in reality , al @-@ Kirmani 's followers included other tribes as well , including most of the Syrians and even some Mudaris , but they were collectively called yamaniyya in the sources ? resumed their revolt . Nasr in turn tried to strengthen his own position by enlisting the services of al @-@ Harith ibn Surayj , al @-@ Kirmani 's one @-@ time adversary , who enjoyed considerable support among some Arab tribes and especially his native Tamimis . When Ibn Surayj arrived at Merv in July 745 he was enthusiastically received by the town 's inhabitants . Scorning Nasr 's proposals for cooperation , Ibn Surayj soon withdrew to the countryside and rose in rebellion as well . Ibn Surayj was also able to exploit the unpopularity of Marwan II among the Mudaris and Nasr 's followers , even though Nasr recognized him as the legitimate Caliph in exchange for his own confirmation to his post . Exploiting this resentment , Ibn Surayj soon gathered around him an army of over 3 @, @ 000 men .

In March 746 Ibn Surayj 's army attacked Marv , but was repulsed with many casualties , and he then made common cause with al @-@ Kirmani ? of whose activities between his escape in 744 and this point nothing is known . With Marwan II still trying to consolidate his own position in Syria and Mesopotamia , Nasr was bereft of any hopes of reinforcement , and the allied armies of Ibn Surayj and al @-@ Kirmani drove him out of Merv towards the end of 746 . Nasr retreated to Nishapur , but within days al @-@ Kirmani and Ibn Surayj fell out among themselves and clashed , resulting in the death of Ibn Surayj . Al @-@ Kirmani then destroyed the Tamimi quarters in the city , a shocking act , as dwellings were traditionally considered exempt from warfare in Arab culture . As a result , the Mudari tribes , hitherto reserved towards Nasr , now came over to him . Backed by them , especially the Qaysis settled around Nishapur , Nasr now resolved to take back the capital . During summer 747 , Nasr 's and al @-@ Kirmani 's armies confronted each other before the walls of Marv , occupying two fortified camps and skirmishing with each other for several months . The fighting stopped only when news came of the start of the Hashimi uprising under Abu Muslim .

Negotiations commenced , but were almost broken off when a member of Nasr 's entourage , an embittered son of Ibn Surayj , attacked and killed al @-@ Kirmani . Calmer heads prevailed for the moment , the two sides were able to tentatively settle their differences , and Nasr re @-@ occupied his seat in Marv . Tensions however remained and Abu Muslim soon managed to persuade al @-@ Kirmani 's son and successor Ali that Nasr had been involved in his father 's murder . As a result , both Ali al @-@ Kirmani and Nasr separately appealed for aid against each other to Abu Muslim , who now held the balance of power . The latter eventually chose to support al @-@ Kirmani . On 14 February 748 , the Hashimi army occupied Marv , and Nasr again had to flee the city . Pursued by the Hashimi forces under Qahtaba ibn Shabib al @-@ Ta 'i , Nasr was forced to abandon Nishapur too after his son Tamim was defeated at Tus , and retreat to the region of Qumis , on the western borderlands of Khurasan . At this point , the long @-@ awaited reinforcements from the Caliph arrived , but their general and Nasr failed to coordinate their movements , and Qahtaba was able to defeat the Caliph 's army at Rey and kill its commander . Nasr was now forced to abandon Qumis and flee towards Hamadan . On the way , in the town of Sawa , he fell ill and died on 9 December , at the age of 85 .

His grandson , Rafi ibn al @-@ Layth , led a large @-@ scale rebellion against the misgovernment

of the Abbasid governor Ali ibn Isa ibn Mahan in 807 ? 810 , which spread across Khurasan and Transoxiana .