

= Asad ibn Abdallah al @-@ Qasri =

Asad ibn Abdallah ibn Asad al @-@ Qasri (died 738) was a prominent official of the Umayyad Caliphate , serving twice as governor of Khurasan under the Caliph Hisham ibn Abd al @-@ Malik . The descendant of a prominent Arab family , he was the brother of Khalid al @-@ Qasri , the powerful governor of Iraq for most of Hisham 's reign . Asad 's first tenure in 724 ? 727 came in the wake of the " Day of Thirst " , a severe defeat at the hands of the Turgesh Turks in Transoxiana . Asad tried to reconcile the local Soghdians to Muslim rule , initiated tax reforms to address the grievances of the native converts to Islam (mawali) , and enjoyed good relations with many local nobles , who began to convert to Islam under his influence . His military expeditions during his first tenure were targeted mainly against restive local princes , and avoided a direct confrontation with the Turgesh .

After his dismissal , his successors reversed his policy of reconciliation , resulting in a large @-@ scale anti @-@ Arab rebellion among the Soghdians . Another major defeat against the Turgesh in the Battle of the Defile was followed by the almost complete collapse of the Arab position in Trasoxiana and the outbreak of a major rebellion in Khurasan itself , led by al @-@ Harith ibn Surayj . Appointed for a second time to Khurasan in late 734 , Asad brought in fresh troops to the province and managed to suppress Harith 's uprising in 735 ? 736 , although the rebel leader himself escaped capture . An expedition in Khuttal in 737 brought about the intervention of the Turgesh khagan at the head of an army . Despite initial Arab setbacks and the Turgesh invasion of Khurasan , Asad succeeded in inflicting a defeat upon the khagan in person in the Battle of Kharistan and turning back the Turgesh army . Despite Asad 's death a few months later , this success was instrumental in preserving Muslim rule in Central Asia , as the blow to the khagan 's prestige led to his murder soon thereafter and the collapse of Turgesh power . At the same time , Asad 's conciliatory policy towards the native population laid the foundations for its eventual acceptance of Muslim rule and the Islamization of Central Asia .

= = Origin = =

Asad was a member of the Qasr clan , a subtribe of the Banu Bajila . His great @-@ grandfather Asad ibn Kurz al @-@ Qasri is said by some traditions to have been the chief of the Bajila in the times of the Islamic prophet Muhammad , and is accounted as one of Muhammad 's companions . Other traditions , however , hostile to the family , report that Asad was a Jew and a runaway slave . Asad 's grandfather Yazid was an early and prominent supporter of the Umayyads in the First Fitna , while Asad 's father Abdallah sided with Ibn al @-@ Zubayr in the Second Fitna , but was eventually pardoned by the Caliph Abd al @-@ Malik (reigned 685 ? 705) .

= = First governorship of Khurasan = =

In 724 , immediately after the rise of Hisham ibn Abd al @-@ Malik (r . 724 ? 743) to the throne , Asad 's brother Khalid al @-@ Qasri was appointed to the important post of governor of Iraq , with responsibility over the entire Islamic East , which he held until 738 . Khalid in turn named Asad as governor of Khurasan . The two brothers thus became , according to Patricia Crone , " among the most prominent men of the Marwanid period " . Asad 's arrival in Khurasan found the province in peril : his predecessor , Muslim ibn Sa 'id al @-@ Kilabi , had just attempted a campaign against Ferghana and suffered a major defeat , the so @-@ called " Day of Thirst " , at the hands of the Turgesh Turks and the Soghdian principalities of Transoxiana that had risen up against Muslim rule .

As the historian H.A.R. Gibb wrote , this Muslim defeat " marks a period in the history of the Arab conquests . It was practically the last aggressive expedition of the Arabs into Transoxania for fifteen years , but of much greater importance was the blow which it struck at Arab prestige . The roles were reversed ; from now onwards the Arabs found themselves on the defensive and were gradually ousted from almost every district across the Oxus " . In this situation , Asad followed a policy of

consolidation and limited military activity , focusing on enforcing Muslim control on the minor local potentates and avoiding a direct confrontation with the Muslims ' main enemy , the Turgesh . Thus in 107 AH (725 or 726 AD) Asad campaigned against Namrun , King of al @-@ Gharshistan (northeast of Herat) , whom he forced to submit and convert to Islam , before going on to subdue the region of Ghur (central Afghanistan) . In the next year , Asad campaigned in Khuttal in Tokharistan , where he was confronted by the khagan , who was called upon for aid by the local ruler , al @-@ Sabal . One tradition holds that he retreated over the Oxus and went on to campaign with success in Ghur in the next year , but according to another he suffered a heavy defeat by the Turgesh . Whatever the true events , Asad 's military ventures were only moderately successful , and most importantly failed to address the growing danger of the Turgesh , who with the support of the local princes threatened to expel the Arabs back beyond the Oxus .

At the same time , Asad tried to conciliate the local population , hoping to prevent them from supporting the Turgesh . He continued his predecessor 's policy of appointing men known for their honesty as his fiscal agents . His reforms tried to stop the discrimination especially against the mawali , the native converts to Islam , stopping the collection of the jizya from them . This measure was vehemently opposed by the Arab settlers of Khurasan , but according to Khalid Yahya Blankinship " it may have helped to discourage the Turks for a couple of years by keeping the Transoxianans on the Muslims ' side " . Despite Asad 's efforts and his good relations with the local Iranian land @-@ owning class , the dihqans , taxation remained a heavy burden for the subject populations , and the greed and cruelty of Arab and Iranian tax collectors alike meant that Khurasan became a fertile field for the Shi 'ite and Abbasid missionaries (da 'wa) . Among the local nobility , Saman Khuda , the ancestor of the Samanid dynasty , is said to have been converted to Islam by Asad at this time , and Saman 's eldest son was named Asad in the governor 's honour .

In 726 Asad rebuilt the city of Balkh , which had been destroyed by Qutayba ibn Muslim following a revolt , and transferred there the Arab garrison troops from nearby Barukhan . Asad also resumed , after almost a decade , the practice of sending envoys to the Chinese court . This move was obviously linked to the Turgesh threat , as the Turks were Chinese vassals and were regarded by the Transoxianians as the agents of the Chinese emperor , sent to deliver them from Arab rule . Asad is also said to have built the village of Asadabad near Nishapur , which his descendants held until Tahirid times .

Asad was dismissed from his office in Ramadan 109 AH (December 727 or January 728 AD) , when in an outburst of anger he had the chief representatives of the four greatest Arab tribes in Khurasan , the Ahl al- ' Aliyah , Azd , Tamim , and Bakr , publicly flogged . Caliph Hisham demanded his dismissal , and after naming al @-@ Hakam ibn ' Awana al @-@ Kalbi as his deputy , Asad returned to his brother in Iraq .

= = Second governorship of Khurasan = =

Asad was replaced by Ashras ibn Abdallah al @-@ Sulami (727 ? 730) . At first he continued Asad 's policy of conciliation , but then reversed it , leading to the outbreak of a full @-@ scale rebellion in Transoxiana , which , coupled with renewed Turgesh attacks , reduced the Arab presence there to Samarkand and its environs . Ashras was able to recover Bukhara , but his successor , Junayd ibn Abd al @-@ Rahman al @-@ Murri , presided over the disaster of the Battle of the Defile in 731 , which crippled the Khurasani army . By the time of Junayd 's death in 734 , the Muslim holdings in Transoxiana had been reduced to Bukhara and parts of Tokharistan . These military defeats , the long @-@ held grievances against the Umayyad government , and the forcible requisition of food by Junayd during the famine of 733 led to the outbreak of a rebellion in early 734 , led by al @-@ Harith ibn Surayj . Harith 's uprising involved both Arabs and native princes , especially from the hitherto loyal principalities of Tokharistan , and spread quickly , with the rebels capturing Balkh . The new governor , Asim ibn Abdallah al @-@ Hilali , managed to check Harith 's advance on the capital , Marw , and forced him to seek terms . Asim 's position remained precarious , however , and he wrote to the Caliph , asking for the placement of Khurasan once again under the purview of Iraq , the appointment of a new governor and the substantial reinforcement of the

province with Syrian troops . Hisham accepted the recommendations , and instructed Khalid al @-@ Qasri to send Asad once again as governor to Khurasan . Early in 735 , Harith renewed his rebellion . This time , whether due to pressure from local sympathizers in Marw or as an expedient way to gain time for Asad to arrive , Asim agreed to a truce with Harith , in which he also promised to support Harith 's demands against the Caliph .

Thus , in early 735 Asad arrived once more to take up the governorship of Khurasan , this time accompanied by 20 @, @ 000 Syrian troops , according to the 11th @-@ century historian Gardizi . He imprisoned Asim for embezzling money and failing to campaign against the rebels , and immediately took the field himself . He soon gained the upper hand in a succession of victorious , if costly , battles with Harith 's supporters . Asad 's success was aided by his long @-@ standing personal relations with the local Arab tribal leaders , as well as by the continuing tribal rivalries : as a Yamani opposed to the Mudari Harith , he could count on the support of his fellow tribesmen ? thus most of the Rabi 'ah , the traditional enemies of Harith 's Tamim tribe , soon defected to him . Asad divided his forces , sending the Kufan and Syrian troops under Abd al @-@ Rahman ibn Na 'yum towards Marw Rudh , where Harith 's main army was located , while he himself with the Basrans and remaining Khurasanis marched on the fortresses of Amul and Zamm . The rebel forces at Amul surrendered and were pardoned , and the garrison of Balkh followed soon after . Harith himself abandoned Marw Rudh and retreated across the Oxus before Abd al @-@ Rahman , finding refuge with the princes of Tokharistan . With their aid , he laid siege to the major crossing point over the Oxus at Tirmidh . In the face of Harith 's forces , Asad 's troops could not cross the Oxus but retreated to Balkh . However , the Tirmidh garrison managed to defeat Harith , who now retired eastwards to the mountains of Badakhshan . Asad followed up this success by persuading the garrison of Zamm to surrender on promises of amnesty and double pay . Asad then led an expedition to recover Samarkand , which had been lost in the aftermath of the Defile . He failed to take the city , and returned to Balkh after destroying the sluices of the city 's irrigation canals .

In the next year , 736 , Asad 's forces cleared the mountains of Upper Tokharistan from the remnants of Harith 's supporters . Many of the latter , including some of Harith 's relatives , were blockaded in the fortress of Tabushkhan by Asad 's commander Juday ' al @-@ Kirmani with 6 @, @ 000 men , until they surrendered . According to al @-@ Tabari , 400 of the men were executed , and the other defenders , including women and children , were sold into slavery . In the same year , Asad moved the capital of Khurasan to Balkh . This decision was influenced by a number of factors : Balkh was the traditional , pre @-@ Islamic capital and remained so in the eyes of the local population ; it lay closer to Tokharistan , where Asad concentrated his military activities ; and was settled by reliable Syrians and removed from the factional politics of the Khurasani Arabs of Marw . At this time , Asad also captured and executed one of the leaders of the Khurasani Hashimiyya movement , Ammar ibn Yazid , known as Khidash , by crucifixion .

In 737 , Asad led his troops again north of the Oxus in a retaliatory campaign against Khuttal , whose ruler had allied himself with both Harith and the Turgesh . While Asad captured a few fortresses and pillaged the land , the Khuttalan regent , Ibn al @-@ Sa 'iji , called for aid from the Turgesh khagan , Suluk . The Turgesh army 's arrival caught the Arab troops , widely dispersed while ravaging the countryside , by surprise , and precipitated a headlong flight across the Oxus . The Turgesh followed after them and attacked and almost annihilated the Arab baggage train , which Asad had sent ahead . The timely arrival of Asad 's main army saved the baggage train 's remnants , before both sides settled for winter quarters . Ominously for the Arabs , the khagan remained in Khurasan instead of retiring north , and Harith now emerged from hiding and joined him . Harith now counselled the khagan to take advantage of the dispersal of the Arab army to its winter quarters , and resume his advance . In early December the khagan led the Turgesh army , 30 @, @ 000 strong and comprising contingents from virtually every native ruler of Transoxiana and Upper Tokharistan , south . They bypassed Balkh and marched into Juzjan , hoping to raise the Hephthalite princes of Lower Tokharistan in revolt as well . In this the Turgesh failed , as the king of Juzjan joined Asad , who was approaching with what forces he could muster . Asad 's advance caught the khagan and Harith off guard ; Asad came upon them near Kharistan when they were accompanied by only 4 @, @ 000 men , the rest having scattered to plunder and forage . In the

ensuing Battle of Kharistan , Asad routed the Turgesh . Harith and the khagan barely escaped themselves and fled north over the Oxus . The Turgesh detachments south of the Oxus were largely destroyed piecemeal by Juday ' al @-@ Kirmani , ending the threat to Khurasan .

After his victory over the Turgesh , Asad sent an expedition against Badr Tarkhan , possibly a prince of Bamiyan in Ghur , who in the turmoil of the previous year had taken the opportunity of capturing Khuttal . The expedition was successful , and Khuttal returned to Arab rule . A short while later , in February 738 , Asad died at Balkh after a brief illness . Ja 'far ibn Hanzala al @-@ Bahrani succeeded him temporarily , until , in July , Nasr ibn Sayyar was named to the governorship .

= = Legacy = =

Asad 's second governorship was of crucial importance to the future of Central Asia . His victory at Kharistan averted a possible collapse of Muslim rule and ended the Turgesh threat to Khurasan and Transoxiana . As Gibb writes , it was not only " the turning @-@ point in the fortunes of the Arabs in Central Asia , but gave the signal for the downfall of Turgesh power " . The khagan 's defeat was a serious blow to his prestige , encouraging his domestic rivals ; backed secretly by the Chinese , they assassinated him in early 738 . The Turgesh realm collapsed in civil war , leaving the Muslims without a serious opponent in the region . At the same time , Asad 's excellent personal relationship with the native nobility strengthened their ties to the Arab government . As Gibb writes , " he was able to attract to his side many of the more influential elements in Lower Tokharistan and the Hephthalite lands ? to this , in fact , was largely due his success in the struggle with the Turks . " His influence led to the conversion to Islam of several local rulers , like Saman Khuda and possibly also the Barmak . Even though as yet " practically confined to the ruling classes " and limited to the territories under direct Arab control , Gibb credits Asad with beginning a process of " true reconciliation " . For this achievement he was greatly honoured later generations , as attested in the work of the 10th @-@ century Bukharan historian Narshakhi . His successor , Nasr ibn Sayyar , was able to build upon Asad 's work and restore the Arab position over much of Transoxiana ; Muslim pre @-@ eminence over western Central Asia was sealed with the Battle of Talas in 751 , and the withdrawal of Chinese influence after the outbreak of the An Lushan Rebellion .