

= Battle of Hama =

The Battle of Hama was fought some 24 km from the city of Hama in Syria on 29 ? 30 November 903 between the forces of the Abbasid Caliphate and the Qarmatians . The Abbasids were victorious , resulting in the capture and execution of the Qarmatian leadership . This weakened the Qarmatian presence in northern Syria , which was finally eradicated after the suppression of another revolt in 906 . More importantly , it paved the way for the Abbasid attack on the autonomous Tulunid dynasty and the reincorporation of the Tulunid domains in southern Syria and Egypt into the Abbasid Caliphate .

= = Background = =

The Qarmatians were a radical Isma 'ili Shi 'ite sect founded in Kufa around 874 by a certain Hamdan Qarmat . They denounced mainstream Sunni Islam for practices they viewed as deviations from the true teachings of the religion , such as the hajj and the worship of the Kaaba , as well as the dwelling in cities and the marginalization of the Bedouin . Consequently , as they gained adherents , the Qarmatians began assaulting the neighbouring Muslim communities . Originally a sporadic and minor nuisance in the Sawad , their power grew swiftly to alarming proportions after 897 , when they launched a series of uprisings against the Abbasid Caliphate . In this period , the movement was based at Salamiyya on the western edge of the Syrian Desert , and its leadership was assumed by Abu Muhammad Abdallah , the future founder of the Fatimid Caliphate . Abdallah 's claims to be the awaited Mahdi caused a split in the movement in 899 . The majority , including Hamdan Qarmat , rejected the Fatimid claims and leaving to continue their proselytization elsewhere .

The missionary efforts of the remaining Qarmatian movement were redirected beyond the Sawad and quickly bore fruit . Under the leadership of Abu Sa 'id al @-@ Jannabi , they seized Bahrayn in 899 and in the next year defeated a caliphal army under al @-@ Abbas ibn Amr al @-@ Ghanawi . Another base was established in the area around Palmyra by the missionaries Yahya ibn Zikrawayh , known by the name Sahib al @-@ Naqa (" Master of the She @-@ camel ") and al @-@ Husayn , probably Yahya 's brother , who took the name Sahib al @-@ Shama (" Man with the Mole ") . Both in Bahrayn and in Syria , the Qarmatians were able to convert many local Bedouin ? the Banu Kalb in Syria and the Banu Kilab and Banu Uqayl in Bahrayn ? to their cause , thus acquiring a potent military force . Threatened by the rise of Qarmatian centres around Salamiyya , Abdallah and his followers soon left and travelled secretly to Ifriqiya , where in 909 they would overthrow the ruling Aghlabids and establish the Fatimid state .

From their base in the region around Palmyra , the Qarmatians began launching raids against the Abbasid and Tulunid provinces of Syria , with devastating effect . In 902 , the Qarmatians defeated the Tulunids under Tughj ibn Juff near al @-@ Raqqah , and laid siege to Damascus . The city was successfully held by Tughj and the Sahib al @-@ Naqa was killed . Leadership passed to the Sahib al @-@ Shama , who led the Qarmatians to ravage Homs , Hama , Ba 'albek , Ma 'arrat al @-@ Numan and even Salamiyya , where they massacred the members of Abdallah 's family that had remained there .

= = Battle = =

In view of the apparent impotence of the Tulunid regime to stop the Qarmatian raids , the Syrians called upon the Abbasid government to intervene directly , and on 30 July 903 , Caliph al @-@ Muktafi commanded that a campaign be undertaken . The campaign was nominally headed by Caliph al @-@ Muktafi in person , who left Baghdad on 9 August and went to al @-@ Raqqah . In mid @-@ August , the Qarmatians under a certain al @-@ Mutawwaq surprised an Abbasid army some 10 @, @ 000 strong near Aleppo , while it was resting and dispersed , with many troops seeking to escape the intense heat in a local river ; the Abbasid troops were routed , and only about a thousand managed to reach the city , where , under the command of Abu al @-@ Agharr , they

repulsed the Qarmatian attacks . At about the same time , however , the general Badr al @-@ Hammami inflicted a heavy defeat on the Sahib al @-@ Shama and his men near Damascus . The Qarmatians fled to the desert , and Caliph al @-@ Muktafi sent men under al @-@ Husayn ibn Hamdan to pursue them . While al @-@ Muktafi remained at al @-@ Raqqah , command of the army in the field was given to the head of the department of the army (d?w?n al @-@ jund) , Muhammad ibn Sulayman al @-@ Katib . On Tuesday , 29 November 903 , the Abbasid army under Muhammad met the Qarmatians at a location some 24 km from Hama . The course of the battle is described in a victory dispatch sent by Muhammad to the caliph afterwards and included in the history of al @-@ Tabari .

According to the latter , on the morning of 29 November , the Abbasid army set out from al @-@ Qarwanah towards al @-@ Alyanah ? both unidentified locations ? deployed in full battle order . During the march , Muhammad ibn Sulayman received a report that a part of the Qarmatian army , comprising 3 @, @ 000 horse and many foot under one of the chief missionaries (d? ' ?) , al @-@ Nu 'man , had encamped at a locality some 12 Arabic miles (ca . 24 km) from Hama , and that the other detachments of the Qarmatian army had joined him there . Muhammad led his army towards the Qarmatian encampment , and found them deployed in battle array . According to the report of Muhammad , the Qarmatian left wing was led by Masrur al @-@ Ulaymi and others , in charge of 1 @, @ 500 horsemen . Behind the left wing was placed a reserve force of 400 cavalry . The Qarmatian centre was commanded by al @-@ Nu 'man al @-@ Ullaysi and other officers , and comprised 1 @, @ 400 cavalry and 3 @, @ 000 infantry , while the right wing was commanded by Kulayb al @-@ Ullaysi and others and numbered 1 @, @ 400 horsemen , with a reserve force of 200 horsemen more .

As the two armies advanced on each other , the Qarmatian left thrust forward against the Abbasid right , which was commanded by al @-@ Husayn ibn Hamdan . The troops of Ibn Hamdan repulsed the first Qarmatian attack , and then the second , killing 600 horsemen . The Qarmatians on the left broke and fled ; Ibn Hamdan and his men pursued them and in a series of engagements killed all but 200 of them . Ibn Hamdan 's troops reportedly captured 500 horses and 400 silver necklaces as well . The Qarmatian right wing likewise attacked the Abbasid left , held by al @-@ Qasim ibn Sima , Yumn al @-@ Khadim , and the tribal allies of Banu Shayban and Banu Tamim . While the two wings were grappling with each other , an Abbasid detachment under Khalifah ibn al @-@ Mubarak and Lu 'lu ' attacked the Qarmatians on their flank and broke their lines . Here too the Qarmatians fled pursued by the government forces , who took some 600 horses and 200 necklaces as booty .

Muhammad himself confronted the Qarmatian centre along with several other officers : Khaqan , Nasr al @-@ Qushuri , and Muhammad ibn Kumushjur led forces from the right flank , Wasf Mushgir , Muhammad ibn Ishaq ibn Kundajiq , Ahmad ibn Kayghalagh and his brother Ibrahim , al @-@ Mubarak al @-@ Qummi , Rabi 'a ibn Muhammad , Muhajir ibn Tulayq , al @-@ Muzaffar ibn Hajj , Abdallah ibn Hamdan (al @-@ Husayn 's brother) , Jinni the Elder , Wasif al @-@ Buktamir , Bishr al @-@ Buktamiri , and Muhammad ibn Qaratughan . With the support of troops from the right wing , who after repelling the Qarmatian left flanked the Qarmatian centre , the Abbasids were victorious here as well . The Qarmatians broke and were pursued over several miles . Muhammad ibn Sulayman , fearful lest his army disperse itself during the pursuit , or leave the infantry and the baggage train ? guarded by Isa ibn Muhammad al @-@ Nushari ? exposed to a Qarmatian attack , halted the pursuit of his own detachment after half a mile . He set up camp there for the night , and with the caliphal spear as a rallying point , began regrouping the various squadrons . Despite the overwhelming victory , Muhammad and his officers remained on guard during the night , concerned of a possible Qarmatian attack .

Several Qarmatian commanders , including the da 'i al @-@ Nu 'man , were killed , while the Sahib al @-@ Shama along with his cousin al @-@ Muddathir , his associate al @-@ Muttawaq and a Greek page fled through the desert , trying to reach Kufa . By the time they reached the locality of al @-@ Daliyah on the Euphrates Road near al @-@ Rahba , they had run out of supplies . When a servant was sent to buy provisions in the settlement , he aroused the suspicions of the villagers with his strange dress and manner , so that they notified a local official , Abu Khubzah . The latter rode out with an escort , and after interrogating the servant went to the Qarmatians ' camp and took them

prisoner . The captured the Sahib al @-@ Shama and his companions were then escorted by Abu Khubzah and the local governor , Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Kushmard , to Caliph al @-@ Muktafi in al @-@ Raqqah , which they entered on 19 December .

= = Aftermath = =

Al @-@ Muktafi returned to Baghdad with the senior captives , who were thrown into prison . Muhammad ibn Sulayman remained at al @-@ Raqqah to scour the countryside and round up the remaining rebels . He too then returned to Baghdad , which he entered in triumph on 2 February 904 . Eleven days later , on 13 February , Muhammad and the sahib al @-@ shurta of the capital , Ahmad ibn Muhammad al @-@ Wathiqi , presided over the public execution of the Qarmatian leaders and Qarmatian sympathizers rounded up from Kufa and Baghdad .

The Abbasid victory near Hama did not yet fully eradicate the Qarmatians from the area ; in 906 , the Banu Kalb , under the Qarmatian Abu Ghanim Nasr , rose up in rebellion , raided the Hawran and Tiberias , and launched a failed attack on Damascus . Nasr was soon defeated and killed , however , and the Qarmatian activities shifted east to the Euphrates , where Zikrawayh ibn Mihrawayh (the father of al @-@ Husayn and Yahya) had also rebelled in 906 near Kufa . He too was killed in the next year during an attack on the hajj caravan . With these defeats , the Qarmatian movement virtually ceased to exist in the Syrian Desert , although their counterparts in Bahrayn remained an active threat for several decades to come .

More importantly , the defeat of the Qarmatians at Hama opened the way for the Abbasids to recover the provinces of southern Syria and Egypt , held by the Tulunids . The Tulunid regime had become enfeebled due to internal strife , rivalries and the defection of senior officers , and the recent failures against the Qarmatians . In 904 , Muhammad ibn Sulayman led an army into Syria . The campaign met with little opposition ; the Tulunid emir Harun ibn Khumarawayh was even assassinated by his uncles , whereupon several senior commanders switched sides . The Abbasids entered the Egyptian capital Fustat in January 905 without a fight , completing the reconquest of the province .