

= Battle of the Baggage =

The Battle of the Baggage was fought between the forces of the Umayyad Caliphate and the Turkic Turgesh tribes in September / October 737 . The Umayyads under the governor of Khurasan , Asad ibn Abdallah al @-@ Qasri , had invaded the principality of Khuttal in Transoxiana , and the local ruler called upon the Turgesh for aid . The Umayyad army retreated in haste before the Turgesh arrived , managing to cross the Oxus river just in time , while their rearguard engaged the pursuing Turgesh . The Turgesh crossed immediately after , and attacked the exposed Muslim baggage train , which had been sent ahead , and captured it . The main Umayyad army came to the rescue of the baggage train 's escort , which suffered heavy casualties . The failure of the Umayyad campaign meant the complete collapse of the Arab control in the Upper Oxus valley , and opened Khurasan itself to the Turgesh .

= = Background = =

The region of Transoxiana (Arabic : Ma wara ' al @-@ nahr) had been conquered by the Arab Muslims under Qutayba ibn Muslim in 705 ? 715 , following the Muslim conquest of Persia and of Khurasan in the mid @-@ 7th century . The loyalty of Transoxiana 's native Iranian and Turkic populations to the Umayyad Caliphate remained questionable , however , and in 719 the various Transoxianian princes sent a petition to the Chinese court and their Turgesh vassals for military aid against the Caliphate 's governors . In response , from 720 on the Turgesh launched a series of attacks against the Muslims in Transoxiana , coupled with uprisings among the native Sogdians . The Umayyad governors initially managed to suppress the unrest , but control over the Ferghana Valley was lost and in 724 the Arabs suffered a major disaster (the " Day of Thirst ") while trying to recapture it . Half @-@ hearted efforts by the Umayyad government to placate the local population and win their support were soon reversed , and heavy @-@ handed Arab actions further alienated the local elites . Consequently , in 728 a large @-@ scale Transoxianan uprising broke out with Turgesh aid , which led to the Caliphate losing most of Transoxiana except for the region around Samarkand .

The Muslims suffered another major defeat in the Battle of the Defile in 731 , in which they lost some 20 @,@ 000 ? 30 @,@ 000 men , crippling the native Khurasani Arab army and necessitating the transfer of new troops from Iraq . In the years after the Defile , Samarkand too was lost and the Sogdians under Ghurak regained their independence , while Muslim military activity north of the Oxus River was severely curtailed : what little campaigning is mentioned in the contemporary sources before 735 concerns operations to maintain the allegiance of the principalities of Tokharistan in the upper Oxus valley . In addition , the Umayyad authorities were preoccupied by the rebellion of al @-@ Harith ibn Surayj , which broke out in early 734 , spread quickly and gathered the support of a large portion of the indigenous Iranian population . At one point , the rebel army even threatened the provincial capital , Marw . The arrival of the experienced Asad ibn Abdallah al @-@ Qasri , who had already served as governor of Khurasan in 725 ? 727 , and who brought with him twenty thousand veteran and loyal Syrian troops , managed to reverse the tide and suppress Harith 's revolt , although the rebel leader himself managed to escape to Badakhshan . During the year 736 , Asad devoted himself to administrative matters in his province , the most important of which was the rebuilding of Balkh , to which he transferred his seat . In the meantime , Asad sent Junayd al @-@ Kirmani against the remnants of Harith 's followers , whom Junayd succeeded in evicting from their strongholds in Upper Tokharistan and Badakhshan .

= = Battle = =

In 737 , Asad launched a campaign into the principality of Khuttal , whose rulers had supported the Turgesh and Harith 's rebellion . Asad was initially successful , but the Khuttalan regent , Ibn al @-@ Sa 'iji , called upon the Turgesh for aid . While the Muslim army was scattered pillaging , the Turgesh khagan Suluk brought his army , allegedly 50 @,@ 000 strong , from his capital Tokmok

into Khuttal within 17 days . Ibn al @-@ Sa 'iji , who tried to play both sides off against each other , informed Asad of the Turgesh expedition only shortly before its arrival . Asad had time enough to send ahead his heavy baggage train , laden with the plunder and captives from Khuttal , back south under the command of Ibrahim ibn Asim al- ' Uqayli , accompanied by the contingent from the allied principality of al @-@ Saghaniyan . Asad with the main Muslim army remained behind , but at the arrival of the Turgesh host , Asad 's troops broke into a headlong flight for the Oxus , which they managed to reach just ahead of the Turgesh . The crossing of the river was a confused affair , as Asad ordered each of his soldiers to carry across one of the sheep the army had brought with it as provisions . In the end , the sheep had to be abandoned as the pursuing Turgesh attacked the Arab rearguard , composed of the Azdi and Tamimi tribal contingents , on the north bank . As the rear guard was thrown back , Asad 's army hurried to cross the river in panic .

Once south of the river , Asad , believing himself to be safe from pursuit , ordered his men to set up camp and sent orders to Ibrahim to halt the baggage train and likewise set up camp . The Turgesh khaghan , after consulting the local rulers , followed the advice of the ruler of al @-@ Ishtikhan and led his army to cross the river en masse . Faced with a full @-@ scale charge of the Turgesh and their allies ' cavalry , the Arabs withdrew to their camp . The Turgesh attacked the camp but were turned back after a fight in which , according to al @-@ Tabari , the Arabs ' servants put on pack @-@ saddle cloths as armour and used the tent @-@ poles to strike at the riders ' faces . During the night the Turgesh departed , and rode south to overtake the Arab baggage train . Ibrahim ibn Asim had dug a trench around his encampment and his troops managed to beat off the first attacks by the khaghan 's Sogdian allies . Then the khagan , after climbing a hill and scouring out the dispositions of the baggage escort , dispatched a portion of his men to attack the camp from behind , focusing on the allied Iranian troops from Saghaniyan , while the rest of the army attacked the Muslims from the front . The Turgesh attack almost annihilated the defenders : the greater part of the troops of Saghaniyan , along with their king , the Saghan Khudah , fell , and the Turgesh seized most of the baggage train . Only the timely arrival of Asad with the main Arab army saved the remnant of the baggage train escort from destruction . According to the account of al @-@ Tabari , the Turgesh launched another unsuccessful attack on Asad 's camp the following day , 1 October 737 , and then departed .

= = Aftermath = =

While the Arab army returned to its base at Balkh , the Turgesh wintered in Tokharistan , where they were joined by Harith . The campaign had been a disaster for Asad and his now mainly Syrian army ; Muslim control north of the Oxus had collapsed entirely , and while the Arab governor had been able to escape complete destruction , he had suffered considerable casualties . The losses suffered by the Syrians under Asad 's command in the 737 campaign in Khuttal were of particularly grave importance in the long term , as the Syrian army was the main pillar of the Umayyad regime . Its numerical decline in Khurasan meant that the Khurasan @-@ born Arabs could no longer be completely controlled by force ; this opened the way for the appointment of a native Khurasani Arab governor , Nasr ibn Sayyar , to succeed Asad , and , eventually , for the outbreak of the Abbasid Revolution that toppled the Umayyad regime .

As the Arabs customarily did not campaign during winter , Asad demobilized his men . On Harith 's urging , on the other hand , the Turgesh khagan decided to launch a winter attack south of the Oxus , hoping to raise the local population in revolt against the Arabs . In this he was joined not only by Harith and his followers , but by the great majority of the native princes of Sogdiana and Tokharistan . Asad quickly mobilized his forces and managed to catch the khagan himself with a small part of his army and defeat them at Kharistan . Although both the khagan and Harith escaped capture , the Battle of Kharistan struck a blow to the khagan 's prestige , and Suluk 's murder by his rivals a short while afterwards saved the Muslims from worse .

Under Asad 's successor , Nasr ibn Sayyar , the Muslim armies recovered most of Transoxiana , and with the Battle of Talas in 751 and the turmoil of the An Shi Rebellion , which terminated Chinese influence in Central Asia , Muslim dominance in the region was secured .

