

= Al @-@ Mundhir III ibn al @-@ Harith =

Al @-@ Mundhir ibn al @-@ ?rith (?????? ?? ??????) , known in Greek sources as (Flavios) Alamoundaros (??????? ??????????????) , was the king of the Ghassanid Arabs from 569 to circa 581 . A son of Al @-@ Harith ibn Jabalah , he succeeded his father both in the kingship over his tribe and as the chief of the Byzantine Empire 's Arab clients and allies in the East , with the rank of patricius . Despite his victories over the rival Persian @-@ backed Lakhmids , throughout Mundhir 's reign his relations with Byzantium were lukewarm due to his staunch Monophysitism . This led to a complete breakdown of the alliance in 572 , after Mundhir discovered Byzantine plans to assassinate him . Relations were restored in 575 and Mundhir secured from the Byzantine emperor both recognition of his royal status and a pledge of tolerance towards the Monophysite Church .

In 580 or 581 , Mundhir participated in an unsuccessful campaign against the Persian capital , Ctesiphon , alongside the Byzantine general (and future emperor) Maurice . The failure of the campaign led to a quarrel between the two and Maurice accused Mundhir of treason . Byzantine agents captured Mundhir , who was brought to Constantinople but never faced trial . His arrest provoked an uprising among the Ghassanids under Mundhir 's son al @-@ Nu 'man VI . When Maurice ascended the throne in 582 , Mundhir was exiled to Sicily although , according to one source , he was allowed to return to his homeland after Maurice 's overthrow in 602 .

Mundhir was the last important Ghassanid ruler ; in 584 , the Byzantines would break up the Ghassanid federation . A capable and successful military leader , his rule also saw the strengthening of Monophysitism and a cultural flowering among the Arabs under his rule .

= = Biography = =

= = Succession and early career = =

Mundhir was the son of al @-@ Harith ibn Jabalah , ruler of the Ghassanid tribe and supreme phylarch of the Arab foederati in the eastern frontier of the Byzantine Empire . Situated on the southern flank of the frontier , the Ghassanids faced the Lakhmids , another powerful Arab tribe who were in turn the chief client of Byzantium 's main antagonist , the Sassanid Persian Empire . Harith had been raised to the kingship and to the position of supreme phylarch by the Byzantine emperor Justinian I (r . 527 ? 565) , who wished thereby to create a strong counterpart to the Lakhmid rulers . Mundhir had been confirmed as his father 's heir as early as 563 , during the latter 's visit to Constantinople , and succeeded after Harith 's death in 569 . It appears that Mundhir inherited his father 's Byzantine titles one at a time , as they were not hereditary : the rank of patricius , the honorific appellation *paneuphemos* (most honorable) and the prestigious honorific gentilicum " *Flavius* " , borne by the Byzantine emperors and consuls .

Soon after Harith 's death , Ghassanid territory was attacked by Qabus ibn al @-@ Mundhir , the new Lakhmid ruler , who sought to take advantage of the situation . Qabus 's forces were repulsed and Mundhir invaded Lakhmid territory in turn , seizing much plunder . As he turned back , the Lakhmids again confronted the Ghassanid army , but suffered a heavy defeat . After this success , Mundhir wrote to the Byzantine emperor Justin II (r . 565 ? 578) asking for gold for his men . This request reportedly angered Justin , who sent instructions to his local commander to lure the Ghassanid ruler into a trap and have him killed . But the letter fell into Mundhir 's hands , who then severed his relations with the Empire and refused to commit his forces during the war with Persia that began in 572 .

= = Return to Byzantine allegiance = =

As the Byzantines relied upon the Ghassanids to cover the approaches to Syria , Mundhir 's withdrawal left a gap in the Byzantine southern flank , which persisted for three years until 575 when Mundhir returned to the Byzantine allegiance through the mediation of the general Justinian , who

met Mundhir at Sergiopolis . Immediately after this reconciliation , Mundhir assembled an army in secret and launched an attack against Hirah , the Lakhmid capital , arguably the Arab world 's largest , richest , and most culturally vibrant city at the time . The city was sacked , plundered , and put to the torch , except for the churches . According to John of Ephesus , Mundhir donated much of his booty from this expedition to monasteries and the poor . The same year , Mundhir visited Constantinople , where he was awarded a crown or diadem (stemma) , marking the formal renewal of his role as Byzantium 's chief Arab client @-@ king .

The war with Persia was interrupted by a three @-@ year truce agreed in 575 . In 578 , hostilities were renewed , but the sources on the period , fragmentary as they are , do not mention any Ghassanid participation for the first two years . In 580 , Mundhir was invited by Emperor Tiberius II (r . 578 ? 582) to visit the capital again . He arrived in the city on 8 February , accompanied by two of his sons , and was lavishly received . On this occasion , among a multitude of other gifts , he was also presented with a royal crown , instead of the simpler coronet or diadem he had been awarded before .

While at Constantinople , Mundhir received permission from the emperor to hold a Monophysite church council , which convened on 2 March 580 . This council managed , albeit for a brief time , to reconcile the various factions and sects of the Monophysites . It was a goal towards which Mundhir had long striven , as when he intervened in the quarrel between Jacob Baradaeus and Paul the Black , the Monophysite patriarch of Antioch . Before leaving the imperial capital , the Ghassanid ruler also secured a pledge from the emperor that the persecutions of the Monophysites would cease . When he returned home , Mundhir discovered that the Lakhmids and Persians had used his absence to raid his domains . Gathering his forces , he fell upon their army , defeated them , and returned home laden with booty .

In the summer of 580 or 581 , Mundhir went to Circesium on the river Euphrates , where he joined the Byzantine forces under the new magister militum per Orientem , Maurice , for a campaign deep into Persian territory . The combined force moved south along the river , accompanied by a fleet of ships . The allied army stormed the fortress of Anatha and moved on until it reached the region of Beth Aramaye in central Mesopotamia , near the Persian capital of Ctesiphon , but there they found the bridge over the Euphrates destroyed by the Persians . With any possibility of a march to Ctesiphon gone , they were forced to retreat , especially since at the same time the Persian commander Adarmahan had taken advantage of the Byzantine army 's absence and was raiding freely in Osroene , where he sacked the provincial capital Edessa . The retreat was arduous for the exhausted army , and Maurice and Mundhir exchanged recriminations for the expedition 's failure . Mundhir and Maurice cooperated however in forcing Adarmahan to withdraw , and defeated him at Callinicum . Upon returning to his lands , Mundhir learned that a combined Persian @-@ Lakhmid force was preparing another attack against the Ghassanid realm . Immediately he set out to meet them , engaged their army and comprehensively defeated it , before going on to capture the enemy camp . It was to be his last victory .

= = = Arrest and exile = = =

Despite his successes , Mundhir was accused by Maurice of treason during the preceding campaign . Maurice claimed that Mundhir had revealed the Byzantine plan to the Persians , who then proceeded to destroy the bridge over the Euphrates . The chronicler John of Ephesus explicitly calls this assertion a lie , as the Byzantine intentions must have been plain to the Persian commanders . Both Maurice and Mundhir wrote letters to Emperor Tiberius , who tried to reconcile them . Finally , Maurice himself visited Constantinople , where he was able to persuade Tiberius of Mundhir 's guilt . The charge of treason is almost universally dismissed by modern historians ; Irfan Shahîd says that it probably had more to do with Maurice 's dislike of the veteran and militarily successful Arab ruler . This was further compounded by the Byzantines ' habitual distrust of the " barbarian " and supposedly innately traitorous Arabs , as well as by Mundhir 's staunchly Monophysite faith .

Tiberius ordered Mundhir 's arrest , and a trap was laid for the Ghassanid king : summoned to

Constantinople to answer charges of treason , Mundhir chose his friend , the curator Magnus , as his advocate . Magnus was probably a Byzantine , hailing from Huwwarin (Evaria) . There he had built a church , and he now called on Mundhir to join him and the patriarch of Antioch Gregory in the dedication ceremony . Mundhir arrived with only a small escort and was arrested by Byzantine troops stationed in secret at the location . He was transported to Constantinople , joined along the way by his wife and three of his children . At the capital , he was treated well by Tiberius , who allowed him a comfortable residence and a subsidy , but denied him an audience . Irfan Shahîd believes that this generous treatment , as well as the fact that he was not brought to trial for his supposed treason , indicate that Tiberius too did not believe the charges , but ordered the arrest chiefly to placate the strong anti @-@ Monophysite faction in the imperial capital .

In the meantime , Mundhir 's arrest provoked a revolt led by his four sons , especially the eldest , Nu 'man , a man described by John of Ephesus as even more capable and warlike than his father . For two years , the Ghassanid army launched raids into the Byzantine provinces from their bases in the desert , even defeating and killing the Byzantine dux of Arabia in a battle at Bostra . Tiberius reacted by raising a Chalcedonian brother of Mundhir to the Ghassanid kingship . A large army with Magnus at its head was dispatched east to counter Nu 'man and install his uncle as king . The latter was swiftly done , but the new king died after only twenty days . Magnus also had some success in subduing or subverting the allegiance of some minor Arab tribes away from the Ghassanids . Magnus died shortly before Tiberius 's own death in August 582 , and with Maurice 's accession to the throne , Nu 'man journeyed to Constantinople to achieve a reconciliation with Byzantium . Instead , he too was arrested , tried , and sentenced to death , quickly commuted to house arrest .

Mundhir remained in Constantinople until the death of Tiberius and the accession of Maurice , when he was exiled to Sicily . It is likely that he is the man Pope Gregory the Great mentioned as " Anamundarus " in 600 , indicating that he was still alive at the time . A 13th @-@ century Syriac chronicle further records that after Maurice 's overthrow and murder in 602 , Mundhir was allowed to return home .

= = = Legacy = = =

Mundhir in many ways continued in the footsteps of his father . He was a militarily successful ally of the Byzantines , especially against his fellow Arabs , the Lakhmid tribesmen , and secured Byzantium 's southern flank and its political and commercial interests in Arabia proper . Despite his fervent dedication to Monophysitism , he remained loyal to Byzantium as the Christian state par excellence ; as Irfan Shahîd comments , Mundhir 's self @-@ image may well have been that of a " sixth @-@ century Odenathus fighting for the Christian Roman Empire , as his third @-@ century predecessor had done for the pagan empire " . Yet , in the end , his independent character and his role as the protector of the Monophysite Church led to his downfall and exile . In the overwhelmingly pro @-@ Chalcedonian atmosphere of Tiberius 's and Maurice 's reigns , unlike his father Harith , who was protected by Empress Theodora 's Monophysite leanings , Mundhir could not count on any influential support in Constantinople . Mundhir 's arrest was followed after 584 by the dissolution of the Ghassanid federation into a number of smaller chiefdoms . This was a momentous event in the history of Byzantine @-@ Arab relations : it destroyed Byzantium 's " protective shield " against incursions from the Arabian desert , an error for which the Byzantines would pay dearly with the onset of the Muslim conquests . It was paralleled a few years later by the destruction of the Lakhmid kingdom at the hands of the Persians , opening a power vacuum in northern Arabia which the nascent Muslim state would later fill . On the other hand , the Muslim conquests , and before them the destructive thirty @-@ year war with Persia , were still a long way off in 584 , and the dissolution of the Ghassanid federation may be seen simply , according to the historian Michael Whitby , as the elimination of an " over @-@ successful quasi @-@ client neighbour " , who threatened to become " too powerful for the good of its supposed patron " .

The Ghassanids left an important cultural legacy as well . Their patronage of the Monophysite Syrian Church was crucial for its survival and revival , and even its spread , through missionary activities , south into Arabia . According to the historian Warwick Ball , the Ghassanids ' promotion of

a simpler and more rigidly monotheistic form of Christianity in a specifically Arab context can be said to have anticipated Islam . Ghassanid rule also brought a period of considerable prosperity for the Arabs on the eastern fringes of Syria , as evidenced by a spread of urbanization and the sponsorship of several churches , monasteries and other buildings . The surviving descriptions of the Ghassanid courts impart an image of luxury and an active cultural life , with patronage of the arts , music and especially Arab @-@ language poetry . In the words of Ball , " the Ghassanid courts were the most important centres for Arabic poetry before the rise of the Caliphal courts under Islam " , and their court culture , including their penchant for desert palaces like Qasr ibn Wardan , provided the model for the Umayyad caliphs and their court . Among the architectural remains from Mundhir 's own reign are the castle of Dumayr and the so @-@ called *ecclesia extra muros* (nowadays identified as Mundhir 's own audience hall or *praetorium*) in Sergiopolis , where an inscription in Greek , celebrating Mundhir , survives . Sergiopolis (modern Rusafa) was a site of particular significance due to the popularity of the cult of Saint Sergius among the Arabs , and was also a focus of later Umayyad building activity .